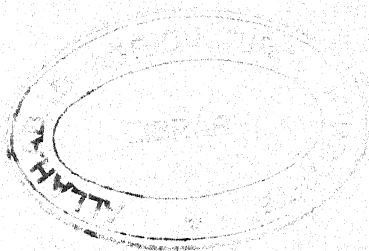


ENGLISH SHORT STORIES
OF TO-DAY



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ENGLISH
SHORT STORIES
OF TO-DAY

Edited by

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN.



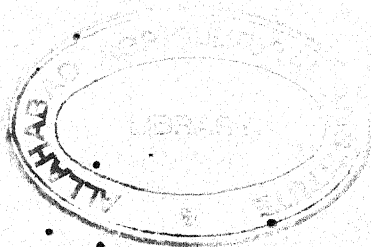
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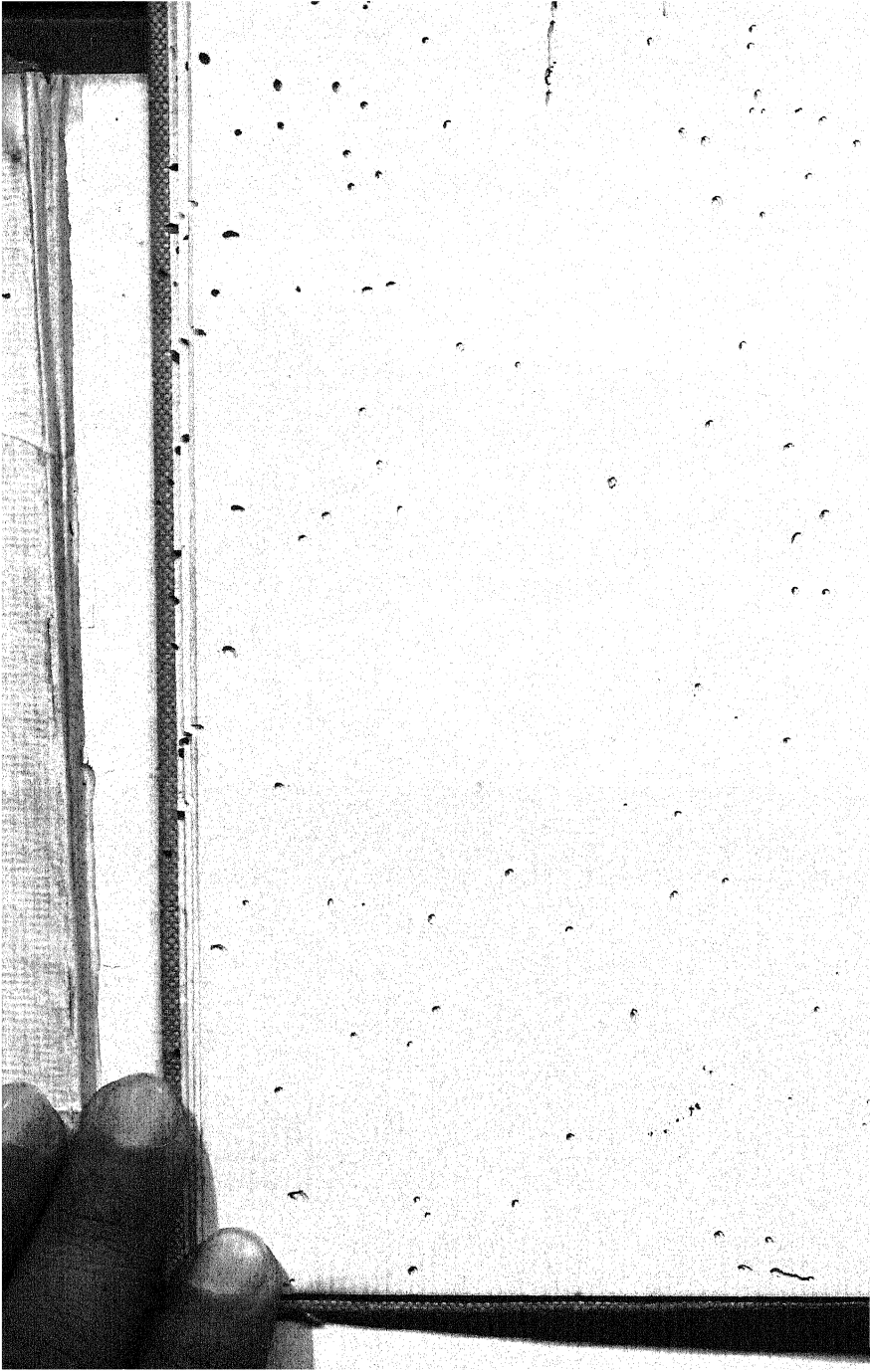
FIRST PUBLISHED IN *Florin Books* 1934
REPRINTED NOVEMBER 1934

JONATHAN CAPE LTD. 30 BEDFORD SQUARE LONDON
AND 91 WELLINGTON STREET WEST TORONTO

PRINTED AND BOUND IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY BUTLER AND TANNER LTD., FROME AND LONDON
PAPER SUPPLIED BY SPALDING AND HODGE LTD.

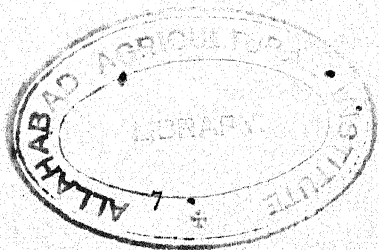
TO
SEAN O'LOUGHLIN





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Introductory Note

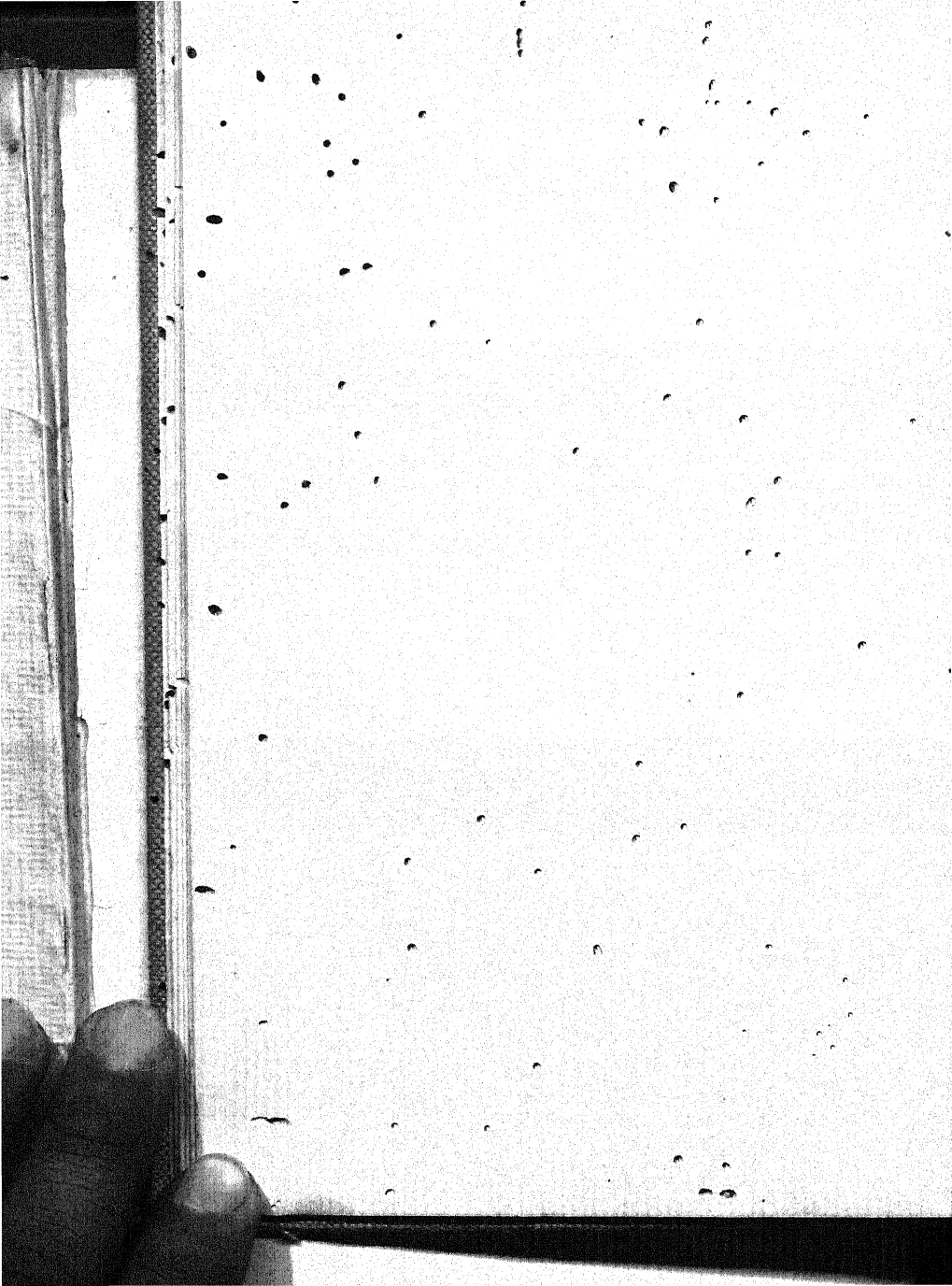
THE present collection is designed as a companion volume to *Modern English Short Stories* which has already appeared in this series. The latter was designed to furnish a selection of the best English short stories which appeared in British periodicals between 1922 and 1928. *English Short Stories of To-day* is designed to illustrate for the most part the work of the better new-comers during the past five years. The two volumes, therefore, complement each other.

I make grateful acknowledgment to the authors of the stories included in this volume, and to Messrs. Jonathan Cape Ltd., for confirming the authors' permissions to reprint the stories by H. A. Manhood, Naomi Mitchison, and Malachi Whitaker, which are drawn from published collections by these authors.

EDWARD J. O'BRIEN.

OXFORD,

November 26, 1933.



Love to the Angels

BY MARY ARDEN

IN that moment of sincerity all that was warm and comforting had fallen away, leaving only the simple, easy to believe – but, at the same time, utterly incredible truth. No, even now she couldn't. . . . Even now. . . . Yet, at the time, it had spoken, not only through what Dr. Stevens had said, but the great white room itself, the feeling of the slippery couch underneath her, and the big man's movements as he gently laid down his stethoscope and bent forward. . . . 'So I'm going to give you my candid opinion, Mrs. Lindsey.' A funny gesture of his; tapping the palm of the left hand with the fingers of the right. She would never forget it; or the glint of his ring that had shone like a little star as it caught the sun – or how marvellously even was the parting down the middle of his thick fair hair. . . . 'Candid opinion. . . .' And then, like a hand crushing the flower of hope: 'If I were you. . . .'

Oh God! who seest even the sparrow fall! Softly, as though it were a sparrow's wing, she stroked the silk tassel of her jumper, while her eyes, bright and dark, peered about, vaguely and yet as though saying: 'I'm looking for something. What is it? I don't know. Oh, I don't know.'

★

'You're very quiet over there, Lindsey.'

'Am I? I was thinking.' And suddenly, with a faint shock of amazement, she realized the chaos her bedroom was in. She sat up a little on the bed.

'Baker, dear, does *all* this rubbish belong to me?'

'What?' A flushed, very good-natured face peered up from behind the lid of the brown trunk.

She changed her remark.

'It's so sweet of you to be packing for me. I do hope you're not bored simply to extinction.'

The face bobbed down again.

'No, no,' came a murmur from the bowels of the trunk. 'Not in the least. Glad to. Don't mēch.'

But of course, Mrs. Baker loathed packing. Oh, it was one of the worst abominations of her life. No one but a brute could have refused to pack for fragile little Lindsey, otherwise. . . .

'George,' she had said, gently smoothing the soft white down on his ear, 'when we're married you *won't* expect me to pack for you, will you, dearest?'

'Pack? Lord, no,' rumbled his comfortable voice, and he gave her soft waist an extra squeeze. 'Why, it's the devil's own job, packing is.'

'She looked at him sideways. 'If *I* did it for you, you'd think the devil *had* had a hand.'

Ha, ha! How they had both laughed. And really it did seem to her quite a witty thing to have said. The little lines beside her eyes crinkled and met each other.

'By the way, dear,' she asked after a moment, 'what am I to leave out for you to travel in?'

'Oh. Oh, yes,' said the low, almost always faintly excited voice. 'My *brown* brogues. There they are, over there, and then, of course, the overcoat – my tweed one, not the other, and I think the fawn felt hat.'

'Right you are.' The plump little woman struggled to her feet and peered into the now almost empty wardrobe. 'Well, there's the coat. I'll leave it hanging up.'

'Baker!'

'Yes.'

'It's ridiculous, but I can't believe I'll be at home this time to-morrow.'

'No,' said Baker seriously, 'I can't either. All the same,' she went on, fastening a wisp of hair back with her slide, 'it'll be much nicer at home for you, dear – with your hus-

band to look after you. I know Dr. Wilkins thinks so. He told me. He said we were all so . . . robust here, compared to you.'

Lindsey muttered something under her breath.

'Not that I shan't be sorry enough to leave,' said Baker, 'when my time comes.' And hand on hip, she stood still to look out of the big french windows over the balcony to the garden where the afternoon sun was drowning everything in golden light - rich careless beauty of Michaelmas daisies, waxy dahlias, lawns and paths.

From somewhere just out of sight came the *pluck! plock!* of croquet balls and a man's very affected voice called: 'I s-ay, Robson, you can't try the hoop yet. The stick first, please. . . .'

'Yes,' said Baker, 'even in spite of George, you know, I shall *hate* leaving.'

'You don't - mean - to tell *me*,' a gaunt face appeared round the window-frame, 'you *mean* that.'

'Yes.' Both the others smiled.

'*Well!*' With a lunge the rest of Miss Westram came into view. Really she was a sight. Her shabby clothes seemed to hang from her as if from a scarecrow, her stockings were twisted loosely about her stick legs.

She looked at Mrs. Lindsey with smouldering eyes.

'I envy you,' she said solemnly, and solemnly she folded her arms.

'Worst place I ever was in. Plagued by the nurses,' she said, working up. 'Plagued by the food, plagued by indigestion . . .' her face screwed into anguish, 'and by the remedies. "I don't want any of y' MUCK!" I said to Sister Thomas. She won't speak to me now, and much I care.'

'Oh, come, come, Miss Westram,' began Baker cheerfully, as hastily she wrapped a pot of cold cream in newspaper. 'Surely it's not -'

But at that moment the clang, clang of the tea-bell sounded.

'Oh, what a nuisance!' cried Baker. 'Now I shan't be

able to finish till after supper. We're rehearsing "The Bathroom Window" at five and I *must* be there. The burglar doesn't know his part a bit.'

'That's all right,' said Lindsey, smiling, and she began to slide off the bed.

'No, dear, now you ought not to come down. Dr. Wilkins would never let you. Have tea up here, do. I'll tell Janet.'

'I'm coming.' The small pointed face closed up.

She refused to be stopped. Doors opened and banged to, laughter echoed in the corridors, footsteps sounded. Oh, she must go down into the vortex just once more. Just once. And why not? What did it matter?

'I don't see why she shouldn't,' said Miss Westram coldly, 'if she wants to.' And she caught a quick grateful glance from the bright eyes.

★

So they went slowly down and into the hall.

Little groups stood about; for the most part, men in one group, women in another. They looked at notice boards, they chattered, laughed, and were so gay. Yes, nearly everyone was very gay indeed.

But Baker was looking at a little round man who stood by himself near the front door. Hands in pockets, he kept rising on his toes and dropping to his heels again. 'Porter!' he called.

'Yessir.'

'Any good at pack-ing trunks, Matthews?'

'Yessir. Fairly, sir.'

'Then pack mine for Fri-day week, will you?'

'Ooh! That's Mr. Poulter, you know.' She hissed her words out in a violent whisper. 'I never heard of anyone so lazy in all my life. I never did. Just fancy asking -'

'Ha, ha! Quite right. Quite right, Mrs. Baker.' Just then a hearty male voice sounded, loud as a gong at her elbow. 'No more did I.'

'Oh, are you there, Mr. Johnson?' she said, turning round. She couldn't hide her delicious agitation and pleasure.

'And I hope you know your part, you bad man!' she cried, shaking a forefinger at the huge blond giant in buff-colour plus-fours, and quite forgetting her companions.

'Well, then, I'll get your cup for you, Mrs. Lindsey.'

'No, no - thank you very much, Miss Westram - I'd like to get it myself.'

So they went on, together yet separate, to the big clattery, rackety dining-room; and a little wizened sister, sitting behind an urn, served them indifferently with cups of tea that looked like puddle water.

Lindsey wanted to find a place to herself where she could watch and not be bothered. But when, balancing her cup and saucer very carefully, she went through to 'The Ladies' Drawing-room,' not only the hubbub of talk and laughter came to meet her overwhelmingly. She was greeted at once like a long-lost friend. 'Why, Mrs. Lindsey! I haven't seen you for days. And how *are* you, dear?'

And without waiting for an answer at all, her acquaintance - very smart, she was, in black and white, with big pearl earrings and dyed hair - went on: 'Now *do* come over with us, dear. We've got a nice little corner. . . .' She piloted her across. 'I've just been telling Mrs. Stuart she's the *image* of Fay Compton. Now isn't she?'

'Yes,' said Lindsey, feeling unhappy, but trying hard to be nice. 'Yes, I think she *is* very like.'

'Well, as I say -'

'Oh, do you really think so, Miss Peters?' said Mrs. Stuart, coquettishly, and wanting to be like the actress, she simpered more than usual and looked ridiculous.

A pause. Miss Peters was drinking, her little finger daintily poised.

Then Mrs. Stuart remarked: 'What a *charming* dress you have on, Miss Peters.'

'Oh, do you like it?' She was a little gruff. 'Saw another I liked better three doors down.'

'Oh, *dear*!' Mrs. Stuart lowered her voice. 'But such a splendid model for a maternity gown.'

'What?' Miss Peters started a little.

'Oh, you *mustn't* mind me. You know I may have to . . .' She put her head closer. Her eyes twinkled and even grew a little moist. 'Dr. Stevens *quite* agrees with me that if all goes well -' She nodded mysteriously.

'Oh, he does, does he?' said Miss Peters, gruff again.

'Only think, though.' Mrs. Stuart turned to Lindsey. 'I shall be thirty-three next birthday. . . . Isn't it an age?' she asked her with dancing eyes. 'How we women ever get through these things! . . .'

But already such a tiredness was creeping over Lindsey that she longed for nothing so much as soft pillows, and with the tiredness came a queer bleak sensation her mind wouldn't grasp. . . . Was it disgust? No - what was it?

'I say, I've got to go along now. Exam. by Dr. Stevens. Take my cup with yours, will you? Thanks. Good-bye.'

It was rather awful - having to make the slow journey back again; hall and stairs and echoing corridor. And it was a bit rotten to find an untidy room and tumbled counterpane. Oh, well. . . . She began to undress.

Voices, pictures, and again voices filled her mind. 'That's just overdoing it,' she told herself as she skinned off her vest. And shivering a little, she put on her pyjamas, buttoned the coat with small chilly fingers and climbed into bed.

The sound of the voices. It just wouldn't die down. And it was hateful to her. Why, it was exactly as though - Yes, it was exactly as though they all rang false - lied in their sound. 'What?' she thought, shocked at herself. 'I can't mean that dear old Baker; that Peters and the rest. . . .' And in a flash, suddenly came the picture of the big white room, the cold light, the tall fair-haired man bending forward. 'Oh, no, no,' cried her mind, recoiling, horribly fearful. 'Anything, anything but that,' and quick, to fill the space, she remembered: 'Nurse! Nurse! I say I dreamt: . . .' She heard herself giggle. 'I dreamt you'd hidden all my clothes. Oh, I was in agony. I hunted all over the place.

I thought . . . 'Oh misery! She flounced over in bed. That falsity! It was there in her own voice. Her own voice lied like the others. They are all tainted - not fit to . . .

And as the dusk rose up from the garden, filling the rooms, filling the great building, and touching the ugly walls and furniture as though with love, her unhappiness grew worse, if anything - more definite and profound.

After a time the bell for rest time clanged out, and was followed by footsteps, voices, shutting of doors, and then quietness.

Now one only heard someone walking, far down below, and presently, the voice of Dr. Wilkins as he came his round.

'Well, my dear, and how has life been to-day?' He was at the end of Lindsey's balcony.

'Well, Mrs. Prescott, well. . . .' He drew gradually nearer, visiting in turn each of the eight people whose rooms were on the way to Lindsey's.

'Well, my dear. . . .' The small, slightly stooping figure hesitated by her window. The old hands fingered the stethoscope.

She helped him out.

'Just fancy it being my last night, Dr. Wilkins. I'll be at home to-morrow.'

'Well, well. Yes. . . .' He coughed a little. 'You must let me come and see you sometimes, Mrs. Lindsey. Sidbury's only a matter of ten miles from here.'

'Oh, would you really, Dr. Wilkins? That is sweet of you - I'd love it.'

'Yes, I certainly will. Well. . . .' He changed his voice. But before he could say 'Good night' she interrupted him.

'I - I've been thinking -'

'Yes?' He looked at her. He was not unused to being detained in this way.

'I've been wondering - do you think we' - she was breathing nervously - 'we go on after we're dead?'

'I'm sure of it, my dear.' He was very positive.

'But, Dr. Wilkins, if we're all so bad. False. Terribly

different, I mean, to what – we're meant to be. Oh, I put it so badly. But wouldn't it be better, Dr. Wilkins,' she ended, her voice quivering, 'if we all of us got drowned in the stream instead of – going across?'

'I know, my dear, I know,' he said quietly, and he looked out at the fading sky. 'I've thought of it too. . . . Much better it seems sometimes.' He paused a moment. 'And yet, I believe,' he went on, 'I do believe that He shall give His angels charge over thee to keep thee. I – have felt their presence. And that at a time when I had no faith of any kind, Mrs. Lindsey.' He cleared his throat. 'Surely they will meet us – there, face to face. Why shouldn't it be that *they* will help us to be – members of the kingdom?' He hesitated. His voice changed. 'Well, well, it's just a notion of mine: that's all. Good night, my dear, good night.'

'Good night, Dr. Wilkins, and thank you so much for telling me. Shall I see you to-morrow?'

'Yes. I'll be along in the morning. Good night. Good night.' And he was gone.

★

But at a quarter to eleven next morning he still hadn't been.

Lindsey's friends had been obliged to go off on their morning walk; no nurse was about, so, for these last few moments, she sat alone, waiting to be fetched.

She sat on her bed, all ready in her hat and coat, clutching her shiny scarlet handbag. And though she tingled with anticipation it seemed to her she cared for nothing but the beauty of the morning.

Still, blue, with just a hint of frost in the air, it was so exquisite she sighed with delight. And when she had gone out on to the balcony, and leaning against the railing, watched the tops of the trees where every leaf and tiny twig was still – such a feeling of lightness came over her. . . . Oh, it needed only a touch, only a touch, and she would float out over the woods and fields, free for ever from – everything.

'Darling!' His hands took hold of her shoulders and turned her round.

'Oh, Nigel, dear, you did startle me!'

'Did I?' His broad ruddy face fell, he looked a little injured. 'Didn't you hear me coming?'

'No, I didn't. But it doesn't matter a bit.' She leant against his waistcoat.

Instantly he cheered up; he held her at arm's length. 'Why, you're looking *well*,' he said, and his eyes laughed – yes, actually laughed – into hers. 'But they don't really know anything about it here,' he said, as though afraid of being overheard. 'You wait till you've seen this new chap I've found. He's – he's *it*. Studied nothing else for years, and when I told him about you, he hadn't only every hope . . .'

But her own special feeling of joy and lightness – lightness, was so great that she scarcely even heard what he said; and it was almost as though she floated instead of walked beside him as they went downstairs.

He tucked her into the big car with woolly rugs. He had cushions for her head and cushions for her feet. They were just ready to start when away, at the far end of the hall, she saw Dr. Wilkins.

Hurried and preoccupied, he came out of one door and was going towards another.

'Dr. Wil-kins!' she called as loudly as she could, 'Dr. Wil-kins!'

He turned with a start. He began to run towards her.

'Good God, child! don't shout, don't shout. You must *never* shout like that!'

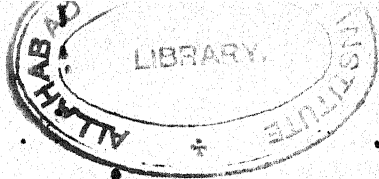
And instantly, at the sound of his voice, her joy died, the light was out. She was more wretched than she had been the evening before – but angry now – almost weeping with rage. Oh God! what did it matter if she shouted. Oh, to break down this wall of – of . . . And as he stood in the drive, panting, unable to speak, a freckle of shadow playing

over his face and his thin chest, she longed to say something bitterly cutting and final.

Yet all that came as she put out her hand, pressed his and, for some reason, smiled, was:

'I shall give your love to the angels.'

A moment later the car slid forward under the trees.



The Tale of a Child

(Hungary — 1900)

BY JOSEF BARD

... to-day it is very warm and we shall go and bathe in the Danube. We are not allowed to bathe in the Danube because it is dangerous but we know a spot where there is a bad smell because it is near a factory where they make leather from the hide of oxen. There the water is shallow and we can all stand up in the water. Jacob too can stand up though he is small but he is very wise and Andreas can swim and we all cling to the neck of Roka my dog. Jacob holds most of Roka's neck although Roka is my dog but Jacob is very frightened of the Danube and he would be punished if he drowned, because his father told him so. His father is a man with a curly long black beard and apart from that he is also our grocer and he has black rings under his eyes. I don't like Jacob's father because he always pats me on the head and then my hair smells of cheese, and I must wash always although I have washed already. But I like Jacob because he is wise. I don't know how but he is very wise. We all play at marbles after class and we all lose. But Jacob never plays because his father told him so. But he exchanges our bad marbles for better marbles and we buy them from him. Andreas says this is because Jacob is a Jew and his father told him so. I like Andreas but I think he is a liar. He told me the other day there is a dead mason hidden in the walls of every big house. The mason was alive when they walled him in but now he is dead. I don't believe it but I don't like it. Andreas' father is a gentleman who builds houses for others and he told him so.

I am sure Andreas is a liar. Now when we had all come out of the water and were drying ourselves in the grass so that nobody could tell we had been in the Danube and Roka sat down on our clothes and made them wet and we drove Roka away with stones although we all held his neck in the water, now Andreas was chewing a leaf of grass and told us he saw God yesterday early in the afternoon.

'You are a liar,' I said to Andreas. Jacob said nothing but he smiled. He is very wise when he smiles. I saw that Jacob also thought that Andreas was a little liar.

'I am not a liar. I came down to the river and I saw a big white cloud in the sky just like a feather-pillow and God flew out, dipped his feet in the water, smiled at me and flew back again.'

So we looked up into the sky. We saw white clouds, fluffy like the sheep in the village and not a bit like feather-pillows. I knew Andreas was a liar. And God simply couldn't fly out of such a cloud.

Still I was envious. I shall be ten years old after two years and I haven't seen God yet. I thought, maybe Jacob had more luck. So I asked him: 'Jacob, have you seen God?' But Jacob looked frightened and he said he must not speak of God because his father told him so. Then I turned to Andreas again and said to him: 'Andreas, I know you are just lying. Look in my eyes and say again that you saw God!' And Andreas who was lying on his back turned round on his belly and looked at me. Andreas is very beautiful. He has long flaxen locks and his face is very white and his eyes are like brown fruit-drops when you have sucked them and taken them out of your mouth and then hold them in your hand to see how much is left. But I could not look into his eyes as mother looks into mine. His eyes were not in his face: they were just like clouds in the sky. So I just said: 'Andreas, I believe you are a liar.' Still I am not quite sure. And then we all went home, Jacob and Andreas and Roka and I and we never said another word.

... to-day Father eats the marrow-bone. When Father is away I eat the marrow-bone, when he is at home he gives me a bit of the marrow, on a bit of bread, salted and peppered. I was waiting for my bit to-day but he forgot me. He often is like that. I said: 'Father -' because I am told to call him Father and not daddie - 'Father, Andreas told me he saw God in the afternoon - do you think it is true?' But Father finished the marrow-bone and said I was a donkey. I looked sad and then Mother told Father 'don't be rude to the child.' Then Father said that Mother spoils me. Then they quarrelled. Then I stopped sulking. I love Mother. All the boys love their Mothers but they respect their Fathers. But my Mother is very beautiful. She has long hair and big eyes and a big mouth and she is soft and plump.

So we were all eating quietly in the garden under the mulberry tree and the ripe mulberries kept dropping from the tree into my rice-pudding, so wonderful is nature. But still I wanted to know whether Andreas saw God. When Father left the table I asked Mother, 'Mother dear - do you think Andreas really saw God?' But she looked tired because Father had not kissed her when he left the table because they had quarrelled and she sighed. She said: 'The questions you ask! How should I know?' And then she also left the table and followed Father into the house.

Mother is very beautiful and plump but she never answers my questions. I shall ask Kate, our cook, who is plumper than Mother but not so very beautiful. She has already told me where babies come from. She will know whether Andreas, the little liar, saw God or not.

... to-day I have not spoken to Andreas in school because I am not sure whether he is a liar or not. This is a warm morning. The sun is shining and we all wanted to laugh but we had no chance because our teacher Prunk spoke only of serious things and had the birch in his hand. Jacob brought some old stamps and we are all collecting stamps because Jacob says it is the best way to learn the map of the world.

Slezak sits behind me and he is the son of our washerwoman, but he hates Jacob. But Slezak is very stupid and our teacher Prunk told him so. We are all a little afraid of Slezak because he is very strong and hits us on the jaw. He says the English all hit each other on the jaw which makes them very strong. Jacob has many English stamps because he has an uncle there who sends them to him. His uncle hits nobody on the jaw but publishes books which others have written, and his father told him so. But when Slezak hit Jacob on the jaw, Jacob smiled mildly and asked him 'is this what you have learned from your Reverend Father and Jesus Christ?' And Slezak said Jacob crucified Jesus Christ and now he must be hit on the jaw. And we were all very excited and Prunk came in and birched Slezak and told the class we were all Hungarians and we must love each other because anyhow we are only a few and our enemies are many. Then he read us a poem which said that the earth is the hat of God and Hungary is a bunch of flowers on the top of the hat. This was written by a great poet called Petöfi who fell in the battle when the Hungarians were just conquering the Russians. We Hungarians have the habit of winning all the battles but this we lost because we were already tired by conquering the Austrians. The Russians and the Austrians are our enemies and so are others we haven't yet learned about and Prunk says our enemies are many and our friends are few and we must prepare to be proud when the moment arrives when we shall die for Hungary. But we still have time and so we must learn Petöfi's poem by heart and we must not forget that now the Austrians are our friends and our King Francis Joseph rules over them too but he loves only the Hungarians and he only rules over the Austrians because his father told him to. Our King is hanging on the wall and he is very dignified and hairy, and he is now very old but he was young when he began to be a King. When we sing the National Anthem we all look at him and he looks back at us very dignified and hairy.

We all read aloud what is called the poem and it was diffi-

cult to remember it because the lines all end the same way, but we were all very proud that we were so few and always conquered our enemies who were many and Slezak wanted to go to the lavatory, which he always wants to do when we must learn something by heart. And Jacob stood up and asked our teacher how could the earth be the hat of God when he told us that the earth was round like a rubber ball. Jacob is very wise and when we were reading the poem we had quite forgotten that Prunk told us the earth was round. We all looked at Prunk and we all saw clearly he could say just nothing. But he was trying very hard. He said Petöfi was a very great poet and very great poets are permitted to say sometimes what is not quite true. But we all thought that Jacob conquered Prunk. But perhaps Prunk told the truth. And perhaps Andreas is not a little liar but only a great poet?

... to-day grandma arrived from town. Grandma's a much older lady than Mother, but this is only natural. She is small and she always smooths her mouth with her fingers because her teeth are not natural. But she was sad to-day because my uncle Berti came with her who is also her son and uncle Berti is ill. I don't know what is wrong with uncle Berti they only say he is mad. I like uncle Berti because he is so funny, and he sometimes pushes his spoon under his chin because he can't find his mouth and pours the soup under his collar which is a good joke from a grown-up man but Grandma looks sad and kicks me under the table when I laugh. Uncle Berti worked in town and he was almost a bank-director but not quite but this was before he poured the soup under his collar. Now he lives with Grandma who is also his Mother. And he is very big and very silent but he likes to play with me when I play in the garden building castles from mudpies. And Mother and Grandma sat under the mulberry tree and watched us and we sat on the ground and when I turned round, I think Mother and Grandma were blowing their noses and I think they wept although uncle Berti made much better mudpies than I did. And then they went into the

house and I followed them to wash my hands and I heard them talk although I did not want to listen but they had not seen me. And Mother was afraid uncle Bertie would get wild one day and wanted him to go to a place where he could get wild safely. But Grandma only wept and cursed uncle Bertie's wife but he had two wives and this was unhealthy for him especially when they both loved him. And then I went to the kitchen and just heard Kate the cook say to the maid that uncle Bertie had water in his head but when they saw me they said no more.

And so I went back to uncle Bertie and he was all right doing well with mudpies. And I sat down next to uncle Bertie and looked in his eyes and they were blue but they were not there. And I thought he might perhaps know whether Andreas saw God, so I asked him. And he only said: 'Very-berry-mulberry,' and then he smiled. And then he stood up and was very tall and his hair I saw was white, and he said 'let us go to Church I would like to pray.' So I took him by the hand and we went into the house and I said to Mother 'uncle Bertie and I want to go to Church.' And Mother looked frightened but Grandma said it was all right. And so we walked out, I holding his hand and I took him to the Chapel although it was three o'clock in the afternoon and God is seldom at home at that hour. And it was very dark and cool in the chapel and candles burnt in the corners and I was not comfortable because uncle Bertie held my hand very tight. And I don't go to Church because Father says he hates all priests and if there is a God there is only one who also hates the priests. But it is beautiful in our chapel it smells good not like near the river where they make leather from the hide of oxen. And the lady-saints were very beautiful and they all had flowers on the altar. We just stood in the middle of the chapel and we were quite alone and it was very silent. And uncle Bertie whispered into my ear whether I could see a gentleman-saint because he would like to pray before a gentleman-saint and not before a lady-saint to-day. And I found him one in the right corner who was tied to a tree and he was

very naked but there were arrows in him. And uncle Berti let my hand go and fell on his knees and began to pray, but it seemed to have little sense and I wondered whether the saint would understand what he was saying. Then uncle Berti wept and he wept very loud and I was afraid because it was very silent and we were alone and I had heard Mother say uncle Berti might get wild. But it was not true because he stood up and was very quiet and stroked my hand and thanked me for taking him to chapel. It was all right what he said, so I told him why did he let himself be called mad. Then he laughed and he laughed just as loud as he wept before, and I got frightened again. But he became quiet again and we walked out of the chapel and he said he wanted to buy me something. So I took him to Jacob's father who is the grocer and I chose a box of green lizards made of rubber-candy. And Jacob's father made big eyes and forgot to pat me on the head which made me grateful. And uncle Berti shook hands with Jacob's father and forgot to pay and we all went back to Mother and Grandma.

Then Grandma and uncle Berti went to the station and we accompanied them and uncle Berti was so big and Grandma very small, but she led him by the hand. And uncle Berti was very pale and when he shook hands with me, my heart hurt because I was now sorry for him. I wished he had something better than water in his head.

... to-day we went to swim in the Danube again where it stinks but it is safe and I kept my head out of water because I was afraid water might get into my head through my ears as with uncle Berti. We are friends again with Andreas and I always like Jacob because he is wise. And we went rather late and we rolled about naked and Jacob was different because he was taken into the bosom of Abraham that way and it happened when he was eight days old and his father told him so. Jacob has very thin legs and thin arms and Andreas is much more beautiful but Andreas rolled very close to me and I told him I didn't like it because we must only love girls

and Kate the cook told me so. And so Andreas rolled on his belly and his bottom was turned towards me and it seemed beautiful but it was his bottom and bottoms are ugly because my Mother told me so and you must never show it except when you are alone and the doctor asks you to. I told this to Andreas but he laughed and then he lied again because he must always lie except when he is a great poet. Andreas lied that children are made of marble and rose-leaves and they are beautiful everywhere and we only cover our bottoms because otherwise we should be too beautiful for our parents. So I called him a liar because I know babies are made by mothers and Slezak the son of our washerwoman brought me the cord which came out with him into the world and he found it in a drawer and it was wrapped in a paper and it was brown and horrid. And Jacob said we must not bother about this, but collect stamps in peace and learn the map of the world because his father told him so.

But I still called Andreas a liar because I saw our dog Roka starting to make babies to his wife and Kate, the cook told me father was not different. Andreas did not answer but smelt the daisies in the grass. Then he said he didn't care what we knew but he dreamt babies were made of marble and rose-leaves. Now I knew he was lying again because I dreamt that uncle Berti came back and I broke a hole in his head with my hatchet and all the water flowed out and our teacher Prunk was drowned in the flood but it was not true because in the morning I saw that Prunk was still alive and teaching history. I wanted Jacob to be on my side against Andreas but Jacob is very wise and he only wants to collect stamps in peace.

So I teased Andreas who was still smelling the daisies which I knew have no smell and told him if he knew everything did he know what the stars were. Andreas said he knew but he couldn't say it because he didn't know the words. So I asked him did he know what the moon was. And Andreas said the moon is a pale woman who is looking for a lost world. And

then I got frightened just like in the chapel when uncle Berti wept loud and I thought perhaps water had got into the ears of Andreas because I also see ghosts in the dark but I know they are not there because my Mother told me so. So I asked him what the sun is and Andreas lifted his head and said the sun is an angry flame which wants to burn everything and the earth is running away from him because he is frightened. And Jacob and I were also frightened and it was now dark and Jacob said we must not ask more questions from Andreas because he is perhaps a prophet and we must be happy when prophets are silent because his father told him so. And we all walked home and said no more.

. . . to-day I saw Kate the cook drinking rum in the kitchen but I shall not tell Mother because Kate is my friend and always answers my questions and Mother is more beautiful but she never answers my questions and Father is always angry. And Kate gave some rum to Peti the milkman who always smells of what the cows leave when they don't behave properly and who is waiting on the cows. And Peti the milkman started to be like Roka my dog when he joined his wife but Kate pushed him back and asked him whether he was not ashamed before the child which was me. And then I remembered that Lola had her birthday and she had asked me to come and have some of her birthday cake and I had not asked Mother because now it was after dinner and I had to go to bed. So I asked Kate to let me in through the kitchen door when I came back and then I went into the garden and picked white and red roses which she liked and walked to Lola's house because I think I love Lola and I would like to marry Lola if she could preserve herself till I grow up. Because Lola is already very big and her hair is perfumed when she kisses me and she lives in a big house, with a big orchard where a brook flows through and she has many young men playing the piano with her which is very musical. And when I arrived she was playing but she stopped and kissed me again and her hair was again perfumed. And there were

many people and they were eating sandwiches and Lola wore a long white dress and her arms were puffed but this was only her dress and not her arms. And everybody was very nice to me though they laughed and a fat man who played with Lola pinched my cheeks, and I told him I didn't like that and I thought he was stupid. I said this because I saw him breathe down on Lola's neck when she played the piano and I love Lola. And Lola saw that I was angry and she said we two will go out into the garden, and so we went out and we sat down under a cherry tree and we sat on the grass and I put my head on Lola's white neck and kissed it which Lola said I must not do. And Lola was sad and she looked up at the moon and she sighed. And she said 'do you see the moon?' And I said 'yes, I see the moon she is like a pale woman looking for a lost world.' And then I blushed because I remembered that I had heard this from Andreas, that little liar. But Lola did not remember it and she kissed me on the mouth and said that it was very beautiful and asked me whether I could say something else as beautiful. Then I said the sun is an angry flame which wants to burn everything and the earth is running away from him because he is frightened. Then I blushed again because I remembered that I heard this also from Andreas the little liar. But Lola kissed me on the mouth again and she said how poetic children are and I saw she thought of the fat man who was not so poetic and then she said I must come when I had something beautiful to say and that she would always kiss me. So we parted in the garden and I did not go back to the house with her because I didn't like the fat man but Lola went back and I walked to my home. I was very happy and wondered what the stars were but then Father was waiting for me in the kitchen and he said he would break my bones if I left the house without permission at night and he began doing so, but Mother came and told him not to be rude to the child and then they quarrelled and I hurried to my room before they had finished and I thought I hated to be beaten and I would kill whoever dares to beat me, only fathers unfortu-

nately cannot be killed because my Mother told me so. So I went to bed and I dreamt of Lola but it was not true because I could not remember it in the morning.

... to-day Slezak was late for school because he said his mother had borne him a brother which is curious because Slezak has no father. But we did not ask questions because Prunk told us more about our history and he said we Hungarians were somewhere else a thousand years ago and we had the habit of multiplying ourselves quickly so we went out to find another home so we came to Hungary which is where we now are and we conquered the people we found here because we had the habit of winning all the battles. But it was not easy to find Hungary because it was far from the place where we multiplied ourselves, but our very own Battle-god sent us a bird and he flew ahead of us and when we arrived he flew back to our very own Battle-god and so Prunk said we have been in Hungary now for over a thousand years and had much glory and we have fought against the Turks who also belonged to our enemies but we haven't yet learnt about them and we have suffered much glory because we were only few and our enemies were many. And we were all very proud but then Jacob stood up and asked Prunk why we had so many enemies. Prunk knows much and has a big wart on his forehead but Jacob is wise and Prunk thought a little while and then said we are the bunch of flowers on God's hat and our neighbours are all envious of us. Then we all stood up and sang the National Anthem and our King Francis Joseph hanging on the wall listened to us and he listened to our promise that we would all die here because we couldn't go elsewhere. Then Prunk left us for half an hour to give us time to wash our hands and eat our bread and butter and we all stood round Slezak who was sad because now his mother can't wash for a month and he did not want a brother because they are very poor and his father died when they hit him on the head with a bottle of rum. Slezak said it was Peti the milkman who did it to his mother but he would buy a

gun and shoot him. Then Andreas pulled me by the sleeve and we all left Slezak and whispered because Andreas asked us to collect money for Slezak because he is very poor. And we all promised to give him our pocket-money for the week and to ask our parents to give him money. Then Slezak had to go to Prunk's room and he came back weeping because Prunk asked him to leave the school. And we all hated Prunk and called him an ugly wart which he had on his forehead. And when Prunk came back to teach history we all stood up and Jacob walked in front of us and asked Prunk in the name of the class to take back Slezak because Slezak is innocent because he did not tell Peti the milkman to do it to his mother. Then Prunk was very angry and told Jacob to go back to his place and said we should not know about such things and that Slezak was a bad influence. Then he taught us more about our glorious past and how we conquered our enemies and how our Kings helped us but I don't remember because we did not listen because we thought of Slezak. And when the class was over Prunk saw that we were all sad and he said he would talk about Slezak to the head master. Then we all cheered and were proud again of our glorious past.

... to-day is Friday evening and I was permitted to go to Jacob's house and have dinner with them because I gave some old stamps to Jacob and he was grateful. And it was very warm in the room and we all kept our hats on our heads because Jacob's God likes that and also we were more than thirteen because otherwise Jacob's God is not present. And Jacob's father was very clean and he had a white stole on his neck and he prayed loud and we all murmured and then we had soup with big dumplings in it and we had roast goose with much stuffings. And Jacob's relatives were there and they had beards but the women were only fat. Jacob has no mother but his aunt cooks for him and she is called Hannah and she is only half-witted but she cooks well. Jacob says Jews are wise, but when they are not they are very stupid. It was very hot and we were not happy

because Jacob's God really lives in Palestine and only comes for a short visit to our village. And I said to Jacob now we will go to my garden and eat fruit from the trees.

And then we walked home which is not far because our village is small. And Jacob was sad because he had no mother and Friday night he always remembers her. So I told him stories to amuse him how the Austrian villagers carry ladders sideways through the forest and cut down the trees to make way. But Jacob was still sad and I looked up at the stars and wondered what they were and whether Andreas the little liar had found the words for them. Then I told Jacob about Lola and that I was going to marry her if she can preserve herself until I grow up but Jacob only smiled and he said I would forget her when I grew up. I know Jacob is very wise but I don't believe what he said. But when we turned into my garden we could not eat fruit because we found Kate the cook weeping under the mulberry tree and Father came out and told her she must go away, because she wanted to push the carving knife into Peti the milkman because Peti did it to Slezak's mother and he also did it to Kate, and Peti also had a wife. Peti must be very healthy because now he has three wives and has no water in his head and uncle Berti had only two wives and his head was full of water. But Mother came out and she is very kind and she patted Kate on the cheek and told her to stay and she sent Father back into the house. And then a policeman came because Kate had just scratched Peti with the carving knife and the policeman wanted Kate to go with him but Father said everything was all right and gave a cigar to the policeman and then Peti came with his head bandaged and said it was all a misunderstanding and Kate remained with us but we shall get milk elsewhere. And Father said to Peti that he would break his bones if he ever dared to come to our house again but Mother said don't be rude to the poor fellow and sent Father into the house. Then Kate went to bed weeping and Peti and the policeman left and I took Jacob to the garden gate because it was

now late. And Jacob who is so wise said to me it is much better to collect stamps in peace. He said love is very unhappy always because his father told him so.

... to-day when Father was eating my marrow-bone I asked him to give me money because we are collecting for Slezak in School. But Father said he had no money to throw away and I looked sad and Mother said to Father don't be rude to the child. And then they quarrelled. And when we were left alone under the mulberry tree Mother said she would give me money but I must be nicer to Father. And I said I am very nice to him but he never talks to me. Mother said Father works for us and he is tired and we must cheer him up. All fathers must be cheered up. They all work for their wives and children and when they don't they are not happy. So I must not forget to greet Father when I see him in the morning which I always do. So I asked Mother why she married Father and she said the questions children ask and left me alone. Mother is plump and beautiful but I don't understand her. I understand Kate much better who is now very plump. But I love Mother and she gave me money for Slezak. Slezak is now back in school with us and he wanted to give me his cord which is in a tissue paper because he is grateful because I collected for him but I did not want his cord because it is horrid. Slezak is very stupid and he hit Jacob on the jaw because he said it will make him strong because the English all hit each other on the jaw which makes them strong. But Jacob always says he hates violence because his father told him so.

Slezak is also very happy because the brother his mother bore him recently died yesterday and now Slezak is again his mother's only orphan. And he asked us to come and see him because he is now in a coffin over the washing-tub and candles burn. And in the afternoon we all went to see Slezak's brother, Jacob and Andreas and Roka and I but Roka had to wait outside in the courtyard. And Slezak's

brother was in a small white coffin and Slezak's mother who is our washerwoman when she has no babies gave rum to her friends who came to see her and she wanted to give rum to us too but we did not want it. So we just stared at the candles and we were silent and Jacob was sad because he remembered his mother as on Friday evenings and Andreas was very pale and he whispered something but I could not hear it. Then we all coughed because we wanted to go out and Slezak's mother thanked us for coming and thanked us for collecting money for Slezak who is only a silly bully. Then she wept and her cheeks were all very red like apples and when she wiped her tears I saw her hands were all red from washing. So we coughed again and blew our noses and went out into the courtyard because the room opens on a courtyard which is not clean. And Roka was chewing an old bone which he had found on the dustheap and we took it away from him. But Slezak only stood there leaning against the door and he looked on the ground and he forgot to hit Jacob on the jaw to make him strong which he always does.

. . . to-day we are very excited because Aunt Leonie arrived who is also my Mother's sister. And she married an Austrian who lives in Vienna where also lives our King Francis Joseph when he rules over the Austrians. But Aunt Leonie married long ago and now she has children and she brought one called Pamperl which sounds silly but is Austrian because the Viennese are also Austrian. Aunt Leonie married Uncle Pepi because he was beautiful and he sang songs about Vienna which is also beautiful and he was very funny and because she thought Uncle Pepi was almost a bank-director but he was only a great traveller for business and he was always travelling when Aunt Leonie had the babies. So we all sat under the mulberry-tree and Aunt Leonie wept and she had anyhow watery eyes and Father said why did she marry Uncle Pepi and she must go back to Uncle Pepi because now they had four children and then Aunt

Leonie finished her cake and wept some more and Mother said to Father don't be rude to my sister and then we were left alone.

Then Mother asked Aunt Leonie what she intended to do and Aunt Leonie said the children should go for a walk. And I took Pamperl by the hand which is very soft and we walked out and Pamperl who has a sallow face and a lace collar talked to me but it was Austrian or Viennese and it sounded funny but I could not understand it. So we walked to the river and I led Pamperl through the dam where the water is very wild and I thought it was a pity the Austrians were our friends now and our King Francis Joseph rules over them also, because otherwise I would push Pamperl into the water and then Uncle Pepi and Aunt Leonie would have only three children and we would all be happier. But I hurried through the dam and I took Pamperl to where we bathe and I wanted Pamperl to bathe in the river because I thought Pamperl might drown without my help and then we should have one enemy less when the Austrians will be our enemies again, because we are only few and our enemies are many. But Pamperl shrieked and so I walked back with him to our house. And there we found Uncle Pepi who is very bald but has a lovely beard and a moustache like our King Francis Joseph but he is not so dignified because he always laughs. And Uncle Pepi followed my Aunt from Vienna because he thought now that he loved her better than gullash and beer which he loves very much. And he took Pamperl on his knees and gave him beer and he sang a song about a Viennese cab which all Viennese sing and is also loved by our King Francis Joseph when he rules over the Austrians. Mother was sad and told Aunt Leonie that she must go back to Vienna to-morrow. And we went to bed but I slept only little because Uncle Pepi sang about the Viennese cab all night long.

... to-day Slezak hit the butcher's son on the jaw who called him a bastard and then Slezak hit him again and

Jacob asked Slezak whether he had learnt this from his Reverend Father and Jesus Christ our Saviour because Jacob hates violence and wants us all to collect stamps in peace. Slezak hit Jacob on the jaw but only to make him strong. But I stood up for Slezak because he was called a bastard which was true but not very beautiful. And Slezak wanted to give me his cord again but I did not want it because it is horrid. Then he wanted to give me holy pictures which he got from our Reverend Father because Slezak has very good marks in religion and the Reverend Father calls him a lost sheep who is now back with the flock. And the holy picture was very beautiful and the Virgin Mary on it looked like Lola whom I love only Lola has no baby. But I did not take the holy picture because if there is a God there is only one who hates the priests because my Father told me so. Then Slezak who is very grateful because I have also collected money for him said he would tell me a secret but I must swear not to tell it to anybody else. And he told me there is a house in our village which stands alone in a meadow and which is always shut with green shutters during the day because the ladies who live there always sleep during the day and only wake up at night. And they are all very beautiful because they are all painted and perfumed and he knows one lady called Amanta who looks like the Virgin Mary on the picture only she is not a virgin although she has no baby. And they have many visitors during the night but they are all men who want no babies. And I thought Slezak was lying to me and I told him so but Slezak swore it was all true because his mother is washing for the ladies who sleep during the day and it is all very beautiful and full of mirrors and he went one day with his mother to help with the laundry and his mother told him not to look but he looked very much. And now I remembered I had seen the house with the green shutters alone in the meadow but I did not know ladies lived there who were sleeping during the day just like in the fairy-tales. So when I went home from school I asked mother to come with me

for a walk and she was happy because I always go with Jacob and Andreas. And then I wanted to go where the house with the green shutters stood and we saw it standing alone in the meadow. I told Mother to look what a beautiful house it was. But she blushed and she said it was an ugly house and I must never go near it. And I said I thought it was the house of the Sleeping Beauty which I read in the tales. But Mother said this was a very bad house and I must promise never to go near it. Mother is plump and very beautiful but she never answers my questions. Kate the cook always answers them. So I went to the kitchen to ask Kate about the fairy castle which stands alone in the meadow because I also dreamt of the fairies but I can't remember. But Peti the milkman was there although my Father will break his bones because he told him so. Peti still smells of cows but Kate our cook loves him again. He also gave me a whistle which he brought for me but I will wash it because Peti made it wet with his mouth. And Kate is now very plump and she weeps but she says she loves Peti again because the baby died which Peti did to Slezak's mother and Peti's wife has also the dry rot and she will die soon and then Peti will marry Kate. And we were all very happy and Kate gave him goose-liver. And I wanted to ask Kate about the house but I thought she would not know because she is only a cook and she cooks well but she never told me a good fairy-tale. I think I shall not ask anyone about the house standing alone in the meadow because all the people I know sleep during the night and they would know nothing about the ladies who sleep during the day.

. . . to-day it is almost summer and now we know already how to add up and subtract and multiply and divide and we have learnt about most of our enemies and of our glorious past and how the Austrians have always swindled us after we have so often conquered them. And we have learned many poems and I think Petöfi wrote better poems than the one about God's hat and I have learned some and I

have won a prize for reading poetry. And now we sing the anthem in tune to our King who hangs on the wall. And soon school will be over and then Mother and I shall go to the Lake Balaton which is the most beautiful lake in the world where all the Hungarians go and the Jewish Hungarians live on one end and the Roman Catholic Hungarians on the other and scattered in between are the rest. But I am not very happy because Lola whom I love will marry the fat man whom I hate and she will kiss the fat man with the same mouth with which she kissed me and she will not wait for me and preserve herself. And I am sad because Grandma came and told us that Uncle Berti is now very wild and he wants to eat his collar-buttons with his breakfast and he will die because now he has more water in his head. So I went out with Roka and looked for Jacob and then we went to find Andreas to ask him to bathe with us in the Danube. Andreas lives in a big house called a villa and he sat in the garden with his mother who has very soft hands which I like. So we kissed her hands and Roka misbehaved on the flowers and we asked Andreas to come with us. And Andreas was reading a book of poems by a poet called Shelley who was also loved by our poet Petöfi. Andreas got the book to-day because he only wants to read poetry and he said Shelley died very young and he was English but very frail, but that was perhaps because they did not hit him on the jaw to make him strong. And the father of Andreas came out into the garden and smiled at us because he is very kind and he builds houses for others and when you do that you can build some for yourself. So we all went to the Danube where it smells but it is safe and we went into the water holding Roka's neck. And I said the Danube was very beautiful this afternoon because the water was blue and green and when the leather did not stink the acacia-trees smelt sweet on the banks. But Andreas says the Danube is not very beautiful and the people who live along the Danube are all very unhappy. Andreas has travelled much already because his father takes him along

with him and he has seen high mountains and he told us stories of beautiful lakes in Italy. So I was sad that the Danube was not very beautiful and we scampered back to the riverside to dry in the grass and I told Andreas to move away because we must love only girls because Kate the cook told me so. And Jacob was also very sad because his father has a bad heart and that is why he has rings under his eyes and I thought of Lola who was not faithful to me. And we all ate grass and lay on our bellies and I said when we grow up we shall also have rings under our eyes and bad hearts and perhaps water in our heads like Uncle Berti and how nice it would be to preserve ourselves. And Andreas rolled on his back and looked into the clouds which were swimming over the sky and he said everything passes away only the clouds pass and stay and I thought this was very beautiful and I could easily have told it to Lola and she would have kissed me on the mouth but now she has married the fat man who is not so poetic as we are. And I also thought this Danube river comes from Vienna where Uncle Pepi and Pamperl live and where our King Francis Joseph enjoys to hear the song of Uncle Pepi. But I got tired of thinking and I played with Roka who rolled on his back and watched Andreas who always looks into the clouds when he finds some in the sky, and I asked Andreas whether he had seen God fly out again because perhaps he said the truth after all and Andreas said he wanted to fly with the wind and hold the whole world against his heart. And he said he hated to think that one day he must die and he said there were many Gods and most of them hated us and that is why we must die. But Jacob who is very wise said that he must not say such things and there is only one God who punishes those who call him names and we must all collect stamps in peace and learn the map of the world, because his father told him so. But Andreas was not listening to him because he still watched the clouds swimming in the blue sky and I pinched him to wake him up and then he rose and we all walked home very silent and said no more.

The Albatross

BY HECTOR BOLITHO

I

I MET Captain Angermann for the first time in Bremerhaven, before the war. He lived in a jolly little blue and white house, away from the docks and crowded buildings of the port. The front path led up to the door, under four arches of huge bleached whalebones. From the front arch he had suspended a small lifebelt, with the name of the house painted on it, in his own meticulous letters. *Sans Souci*, he had called it, because, as he told me when I knew him better, it was in the gardens of *Sans Souci*, at Potsdam, that he courted his wife on a summer day in nineteen hundred and ten.

Captain Angermann was good looking in a hard, Prussian sort of way. He was dark and strong and he walked arrogantly. He was something of a scholar too, for he had edited a book on sea-birds. He was more proud of this than of having taken a full-rigged ship around the Horn before he was thirty. At the time when I first met him, his book had just been published in Leipzig.

I had been asked by a publisher in Munich to write a treatise on albatrosses. It may sound dull, written down like that. But no man could think albatrosses dull, once he had seen them, white, big, and sharp-winged, wheeling above the blue silk water of the Pacific, their mighty wings stretched fourteen feet across the sky. You may say what you will about the imperial eagle, circling over the parapet of a mountain. His beauty is earthly, compared with the strange, almost spiritual beauty of a great albatross, its

breast white as snow, its cry mingling with the noise of a flag slapping a mast at the end of a schooner. I used to see them off the New Zealand coast, myself stretched on the sun-baked deck, lazy, hot, stripped to the waist, watching their big wings which never seemed to tire, their rhythmic whirling, their sudden swoop down to the tide, when a steward threw potato peelings over the side of the ship.

Once, on a German freighter which was trading between Auckland and Newcastle, I saw a ragamuffin of a sailor from Hamburg shoot one and land it. It was as bad as murder, a sort of sacrilege of the sea. When they held it up on the hatch, its pointed wings beating the air in a last death twitch, it was like an angel, torn out of one of those sentimental pictures of children being guarded while they sleep. Its wings beat in a sort of wild agony, and then, when it was dead, the sailors measured it as if it were some common trophy. I think I realized then the almost human quality that lifts the albatross above all other winged things.

So it was no pain or trial to me, when the little eager publisher in Munich said he'd like me to write the treatise for him. It was through him that I went to Bremerhaven, out of the crowded streets of the port, to the little white and blue house, up under the whalebone arches, with the letter of introduction to Ernst Angermann.

II

He came to the door himself when I knocked. He seemed to be too big for the little house, as if he might stretch out his iron arms and crumple the walls in his hands. And yet that sense of size left him when we sat on either side of a table to talk. His movements were quick, his eyes were sparkling, and his hands moved incessantly, lean and strong and brown, among the papers which lay between us. 'Albatrosses,' he said. And then he repeated it twice, giving the two ss's a little hiss as he said them. 'Albatrosses.'

His wife appeared with a jug of beer. She was a Bavarian, I suppose, fair, with a soft voice and calm eyes. She seemed

to be frightened and self-conscious, willing to smile, but eager to be back again among her kitchen things.

'My wife, she is what you call timid,' he said, and I found myself committing the very un-English sin of adding: 'Yes, but she is very beautiful.'

'Ah so,' he answered, and we leaned across the table again, lifting the mugs of beer, letting the lids shut down with a tap after each draught. It was much more fun drinking thus than from our own dull, English tumblers.

'But there are many sea-birds,' he said. 'Why is it that you are interested mostly in albatrosses?'

'Partly because I have always loved them, partly because my publisher wishes me to be interested for the moment. But,' I added, 'it is mostly because I have always thought them interesting and strong and beautiful. They have so much more character than - than eagles, or any other birds for that matter - it is difficult to explain - but I always think there is something half-human about them.'

Captain Angermann smiled, his slow lips moving and showing his white, pointed teeth. 'That is true, there is something half-human about them. But it is not for this that you came. Your letter says that you wish to know of their nests at Tristan da Cunha.'

Ernst Angermann had been at Tristan. He opened a portfolio, full of minute and patient drawings, made on pale-blue paper. And then, with his quick sharp hands turning over the leaves, he told me what I had set out to know. He had seen their strange courtship dances, he had seen their lonely white eggs, lying upon the open ground. He had measured them and watched them, and each little fact that fell so glibly from his lips, was illustrated by one of the hundreds of little sketches. There was one of a bird, its wings fourteen feet spread, so heavy with food that it lay, gorged and inert, upon the rocks. I had never seen such drawings, with lace-like details of rocks and wings and, about the edge of each page, minute sketches of beaks and wings and claws.

My pencil moved rapidly as he spoke and, at the end, he chose one drawing of an albatross in flight and lifted it from the portfolio. He had coloured it with chinese white, so that, drawn upon the blue paper, it looked as if it flew against the sky.

'And this drawing you must accept from me,' he said.

'There you have found what I always see,' I told him. 'You have made the bird seem mournful and remote – do you know what I mean – no other birds have as much expression. It is absurd to think that there could be much expression on the face of a bird. But here you have it – it is half in their eyes. A sort of human sensibility; anybody who has seen them fly must have seen it too, don't you think?'

'You are right,' he said. 'But do you know the legend about the albatross? Do you know that we people of the sea believe that they bear the souls of dead mariners in their white breasts?'

I said that I, too, had heard the story, and I quoted him then, the lines from *The Ancient Mariner*.

'But more than that,' he said. 'In the archives in Bremen there is a diary of an early captain which I have seen. He sailed far away, in strange places, more than two hundred years ago. I did not read it all, when I was allowed to see it some years ago. But there was a long account of a journey he made around the Horn. I have been there myself, in a full-rigged ship.'

'An extraordinary experience?' I said.

'No, I went when it was peaceful and calm. But when this man went, two hundred years ago – his name was Beck – he sailed through a storm which should have destroyed him. He wrote that the forked lightning was so low that it passed between the masts. Meteors fell on the ship and burned. There seems to have been a miracle which carried her through the storm. When he turned north again, with the storm past and the Andes rising against the sky, so that he could see them, so close were they in to the shore, they came upon a hulk, a *ghost-ship*, he called it. Of course, his fancy

may have been distorted by the strain of the storm. But others say they have seen the strange ghost-ship of the Horn, and heard its bells. They ring through the mists and rain, whether there is a storm or whether it is calm. This good man Beck wrote about ten pages in this curious little yellow diary of his. And he said the ship was transparent, like a human ghost.'

'And what of the albatrosses? Surely they were not there so soon after the storm.'

'That is the magic touch and end of Beck's story,' added Angermann. 'He wrote that as the ghost-ship moved slowly past, with his own sailors shivering on the deck, the Catholics among them crossing themselves and running their rosaries through their agitated fingers, eleven great white birds circled over the transparent hulk, circling and swooping down, and moving forward as the spectre drifted on.'

'There could be no food for them.'

'No, but Beck added his assurance that the story of the albatross was true - that the birds bore the souls of the sailors who had perished in the ship when she was burned. There are many early manuscripts written by sailors, and every old port has its legend about the birds. I am a matter-of-fact German scholar,' Angermann added, 'and I do not allow myself the fancies and romantic imagery of the Latins. I am a scientist and not a poet. But, I believe that even science itself could find some reason why a legend grows and stays. You say, in England: "There can never be smoke without fire." Who are we to set the talents of the Almighty within the limits of our own knowledge?'

'Ghosts of animals are not rare - that is if you believe in ghosts at all,' I said.

'Ah, but this is not the ghost of an animal. The living bird; you yourself have said that they have a mournful, half-human character. The living bird bears the soul of the mariner over the water he loved. Anyway, it is a pretty legend, although it can have no place in your treatise,' he added.

I rolled up my drawing carefully. And then Angermann's pretty Bavarian wife came in with another jug of beer. Angermann walked down the path with me, under the arched whalebones. Just as I left him, I pointed to the lifebelt and its name, *Sans Souci*. 'That is very true of your pretty house, Captain. It has been pleasant coming here.' So we shook hands, Angermann snapping his heels and bowing with smart, Prussian correctness. I went back into the crowded port of Bremerhaven.

III

That story and the writing of my treatise belong to a summer day, some years before the war. The summer day, the treatise, and the memory of Ernst Angermann had become very dim to me by 1920. I had tramped across ten new countries by then. I had sweated on the deck of a schooner carrying copra among the Samoan Islands. I had felt the cool Indian Ocean wind sweep in over the hot stretches of Natal, I had crossed the lofty Rockies, and I had crawled through Irish mud to see Tara's caves. Sometimes, in the intensity of the war, I recollected Angermann standing by his gate, the white, bleached whalebone arches behind him, the lifebelt with the legend *Sans Souci* swinging overhead. But by when I came to Sydney, in 1920, I think I had forgotten him altogether.

IV

I was choking in the middle of an Australian summer, when I suddenly made up my mind to escape. Within two days I found myself on the deck of the *Halberstadt*. She was bound for Naples, Genoa, and Bremen, and I think she was the first German freighter to sail from Australia after the war.

I was the only British passenger: the others were sad German people who had been interned in Australia all through the long, mutilated years since 1914. We were twelve, and we dined with the captain and officers in the saloon. I can

remember the first night, after we had steamed away from Sydney Harbour, the light wilting on the black horizon and the odd sense of excited loneliness that came over me as I lay in my cabin, listening to the expatriated exiles singing in the saloon. The pain of their loneliness and all the wretched strain of their life, poured into a hundred little songs - gentle peasant songs, big, swelling songs, and then, with a sort of grand passion, their anthem. Why they did not murder me as I slept, I do not know. There might have been some excuse for them if I had been riddled and cold, when the first silver-blue dawn came, with the *Halberstadt* steaming alone, carrying her exiles back to Bremen.

We did not sail until it was almost midnight. So I did not meet the captain until I went into the saloon for breakfast. It wasn't easy, sitting down to eat with all these sad people who had been my country's enemy two years before. But they seemed to see my discomfort and, from that first breakfast until they carried in the flaming plum pudding for my birthday, the night before we came to Naples, they made me contented.

I had almost finished my breakfast when the captain came in, older, taller it seemed, but the same Angermann who had walked with me to the door of his cottage in Bremerhaven, seven or eight years before. He was not a man to be surprised, and beyond a spontaneous smile, which showed that he was pleased to see me again, he did nothing and said nothing as he sat down at the other end of the table. There were three more ports before we set out on the great stretch of the Indian Ocean and we did not meet at meals for two days. He was forever on the bridge or dining alone in his cabin. But, as we left Adelaide, with the ship heavy with this strange, first post-war cargo for Germany, he sent me a message and asked me to dine with him in his cabin that night.

It was the first of many wonderful and uncanny evenings on the *Halberstadt*, and now, as I allow my mind to pass back over the hours of conversation we had together, it is difficult

to choose just those occasions and moments which contribute to this story of the strangest and most versatile man I have ever met. His conversation danced from one subject to another. He had some rare piece of knowledge on every topic, but he added to its lustre with his own theories and imagination. Hypnotism, early pottery, the habits of lonely wild tribes in India, geology, reminiscences of the little Courts of South Germany, and great tales of the sea. He was a delight to me, every moment we were together. But I have to reject those memories and recall the first occasion on which he mentioned albatrosses to me again. I had left the subject alone. Perhaps he had seen my treatise and wished to avoid mentioning it. I had always felt humble and self-conscious about its merits myself.

'Your treatise on albatrosses,' he said one night. 'It was very good. But much has been discovered since then.'

We had been talking of the development of spiritual mediums and of the possibility of transferring the spirit of a being from one physical body to another. The subject led him into a labyrinth of strange and picturesque notions and theories. 'You remember,' he said, 'how we talked of the albatrosses bearing the souls - the spirits of dead sailors. If the spirit, which is not bound by physical bonds, can pass to another physical body at death, why can't it be made to pass from one person to another in life - or from one animal to another? The spirit or the soul is as separate from the body and as independent of its prison as if it were a bird in an open cage. Why cannot the soul - the bird - fly from its prison and rest where it wishes?'

I smiled but I had no answer. He went on with the fanciful thought: 'I have studied this deeply, in these lonely years of the war. I have no wish to stay always within my physical body,' he added. And as he said it, a new intensity and strain came into his voice. He touched his breast with his hand. 'I am very tired of my physical body,' he said. 'I have not told you, my friend, that the war is not the only sadness which has come into my life since I knew you in

Bremerhaven. My wife, whom you saw, has died – it was when I was away at sea. I never saw her again. But, if I had not got the belief that my spirit is free of my body and able to fly, like the bird we spoke of, from its dreary prison, why, I would not want to live.’

He talked on, this night and on other nights, and there was no hindrance to the charm of listening to him, and no hindrance to the peace of the ship, except the deadly enmity which existed between Angermann and his Second Officer.

To have explained or interpreted one of them to the other would have been impossible. Angermann was a disciplinarian and the Officer was a shifty, lazy vulgarian. They quarrelled to a point of wild anger, and, as if they were two children who should be kept apart, we prayed that they should never meet at the table and never happen to be on the deck at the same time.

The reasons for this antagonism were a mystery to me, until a day when we had gathered on the aft-deck, to see a pig being killed. We had travelled around the Australian coast by then and I was growing fat and contented, through the hot, lazy days. A crate of bedraggled chickens lived on the top deck, to provide us with white meat, and a wallowing fat pig nosed about the galley and men’s quarters, waiting for the day when we should want him to give up the ghost for our benefit.

The day had come, and the ugly black pig was the centre of an unsympathetic circle which had gathered to see his execution. I stood near enough to two sailors to hear their conversation, which was carried on in a common Southern dialect. They began with lewd memories of their travels, and then, when Captain Angermann appeared on the deck, they lowered their soft Bavarian voices and included him in their gossip. To set down their remarks about the Second Officer would shock and confuse, for the facts were clouded by irrelevant babble, but they held my attention from the moment when one of them said that Angermann and the Second Officer had been on the same ship, seven years before.

The little eager sailor with the leather shirt was full of information. Angermann had a cruel, perhaps a mad side to his nature which I had never seen; indeed, it seemed that all his brutality poured itself upon the unfortunate man who was unable to escape from him. The reason! One day, seven years before, this man, whose name was Lewisohn, had shot an albatross – the ship, they said, was carrying Christmas toys from Hamburg to Sydney – the last time that Australian children played with German toys before the war. Lewisohn was an apprentice then and he was new to the South. The ship had called at Fremantle and some of her Noah's arks and dolls had been loaded on to the dry, sun-baked wharf, before she sailed south again. The Bavarian sailor had a tongue for a good story, and he refreshed the narrative with a hundred picturesque little details which escape me now. He talked of a calm, cool evening; after the dreary heat of the tropics, and of a lonely albatross which had joined the ship, its milky wings cutting the greying evening light. Angermann had been watching the bird, rising and falling above the tide. The sailor even told of Angermann's cigar, of how it hung, unsmoked between his fingers, as he stood, hypnotized by the rhythm of the bird as it flew in, nearer to the ship. And then Angermann saw Lewisohn, little more than a boy then, creeping along between the barrels, until he was beneath the albatross, when its wide wings carried it in, above the ship. Before Angermann could call or move, Lewisohn had raised a rifle and had fired. The bird fell on the deck, its enormous wings beating the air, until it crumpled up in a miserable white heap. Angermann ran down and struck the boy with a telescope – the ship was in a fever of excitement for two days. Lewisohn was unconscious, and when the ship came to Sydney he was left on shore.

From this point the sailor knew nothing – but he added: 'Angermann is clever, but he is mad.' And I suddenly realized this myself also – clever, but mad.

As if the strings of a marionette show had been suddenly

pulled, Angermann and Lewisohn appeared on the deck together, and I watched Lewisohn edging away from him – everybody else on the deck was agitated by the filthy sight of the bleeding pig, the knife on the deck, and the bucket of blood which had gushed from the animal's throat.

v

I was the lonely spectator of the next, astounding chapter in Angermann's story. We were coming into warmer water, and at night, I left the saloon with my coffee cup in my hand, to drink it in the cool quiet of the stern of the ship. I sat upon a barrel, in the shadows, where I could see without being seen. I was leaning back, in a half-sleep, when I heard something move near me. I opened my eyes to see Captain Angermann walk to the stern rails and lean over, looking down into the phosphorescent maelstrom in our wake. He lifted his arms – his hands were white enough to look like two birds as he waved them in the dark. The stern light was shielded so that it lit only the water behind us. Angermann moved a few feet along the rail of the ship and after turning, to be sure he was alone, he waved his hands again. The darkness in front of him shivered and the vast wings of an albatross came in towards him, beating the air and the very rails upon which he was leaning. Angermann seemed to be caressed by the big wings: they beat about him, so close that his black shape was swallowed into the agitated white feathers.

When the albatross moved away from the ship, Angermann had disappeared into the great white body which was flying away into the night. The moment was so fantastic that I could not believe in it. I ran back to the saloon – I can remember kicking my coffee cup along the deck and leaving it broken, in the scuppers. Angermann was not in the saloon, nor was he in his cabin. I was afraid to tell anybody of what I had seen. I had a sneaking fear of appearing ridiculous. So I sat in the saloon and waited. It was twelve o'clock before Angermann came in: he ate a piece of

apfelkuchen, drank a glass of beer, and went to his cabin. I was convinced that a fantasy in my mind had deceived my eyes. My logical prejudices rose strongly within me and I passed the occasion as a traveller might pass a mirage in a desert.

VI

Two days after this was the birthday of Lewisohn. On this night, Captain Angermann dined alone in his cabin and Lewisohn enjoyed the escape from his vigilance – indeed, he sent bottles of wine and cognac around the table and became so drunk himself that we sat up, in stiff fear, hoping that Angermann would not come in and see him. Lewisohn was more pathetic than terrible. He had sneaking feet and shifting eyes. Even in his uniform he managed to reveal his vulgarity. A yellow handkerchief, a bracelet on his podgy, hairless wrist. He drank a last glass of cognac, smacking the table with his left hand and giving us a toast which was a silly, meaningless indecency. At that moment Captain Angermann came into the saloon quietly. He stood behind Lewisohn and snatched the glass from his hand. Lewisohn jumped to his uncertain feet and, as he reeled, Angermann pinned his arms behind his back and pushed him out of the saloon. Within a minute he was back again, angry and black, but too certain of his self-control to speak in anything but a slow, quiet voice. He spoke to me. 'I am sorry and ashamed for my ship that you should see this. He will not dine in the saloon again.'

'It is his birthday, Captain Angermann,' I pleaded.

'Then I am sorry he ever had his first birthday,' he answered. 'The place for pigs is not in the saloon of my ship.' He left us then and in the noise and fuss of stewards clearing the table, some of us withdrew to the other end of the saloon—others went out on to the deck and left us to play a game of skat. We must have been playing for an hour—I remember that I had just picked up a welcome knave of spades—when we heard a terrible scream—it split

the air, as we threw down our cards and ran out on to the deck. Others were running towards the stern of the ship. There was a deck cargo of barrels and we had to scramble over these, for the narrow passageway was already crowded with sailors. In the open space beyond the barrels, a colossal white bird was struggling with Lewisohn – it seemed to envelop his little black body. ‘An albatross – it is too far north for an albatross,’ somebody shouted. The Chief Officer ran forward, and as he drew a revolver from his pocket, the albatross dropped Lewisohn on to the deck and rose up above the ship. The Officer fired twice – a sailor shouted: ‘Left wing – he falters – you have shot his left wing.’ But the bird melted into the black heights and we were left with Lewisohn, dead and mutilated, on the deck. ‘Wo bleibt der Kapitän – wo bleibt der Kapitän?’ somebody cried. But Angermann had not appeared. The bird had gouged out Lewisohn’s eyes – his face and breast had been pierced again and again – his poor coloured silk handkerchief fluttered in his dead hand.

We carried him into the saloon, while the Chief and the Engineer searched for Angermann. It was half an hour before he came into the saloon, calm, but with a terrible and cold expression in his eyes. ‘Lewisohn is dead, sir,’ said the Chief Officer: ‘attacked by a bird – I fired at it, but I didn’t bring it down – I think I hit it, though – in the wing.’

‘I am sorry – I did not hear.’ Angermann turned to me and spoke in English. ‘I have been mending some things and I cut myself – it is nothing – poor Lewisohn – on his birthday also.’

Angermann walked over to the body. The arrogance of his stride could be seen, even in those four short paces. He took his left hand out of his pocket then and I saw that his wrist and his arm were covered by a white bandage.



Green Thoughts

BY JOHN COLLIER

Annihilating all that's made

To a green thought in a green shade. — MARVELL.

THE orchid had been sent among the effects of his friend, who had come by a lonely and mysterious death on the expedition. Or he had bought it among a miscellaneous lot, 'unclassified,' at the close of the auction. I forget which, but one or the other it certainly was; moreover, even in its dry, brown, dormant, root state, this orchid had a certain sinister quality. It looked, with its bunched and ragged projections, like a huge dead insect, or a rigid yet a gripping hand, hideously gnarled, or a grotesquely whiskered, threatening face. Would you not have known what sort of an orchid it was?

Mr. Mannering did not know. He read nothing but catalogues and books on fertilizers. He unpacked the new acquisition with a solicitude absurd enough in any case, towards any orchid, or primrose either, in the twentieth century, but idiotic, foolhardy, doom-eager, when extended to an orchid thus come by, in appearance thus. And in his traditional obtuseness he at once planted it in what he called 'the Observation Ward,' facetious fellow! a hot-house built against the south-wall of his dumpy red dwelling. Here he set always the most interesting additions to his collection, and especially weak and sickly plants, for there was a glass door in his study wall, through which he could see into this hot-house, so that the weak and sickly plants could encounter no crisis without his immediate knowledge and his tender care.

This plant, however, proved hardy enough. At the ends of thick and stringy stalks, it opened out bunches of darkly shining leaves, and soon it spread in every direction, usurping so much space that first one, then another, then all its neighbours had to be removed to a hot-house at the end of the garden. It was, Cousin Jane said, a regular hop-vine. The comparison was little to the point. At the end of the stalks, just before the leaves began, were set groups of tendrils, which hung idly, serving no apparent purpose. Mr. Mannering thought that very probably these were vestigial organs, a heritage from some period when the plant had been a climber. But when were the vestigial tendrils of an ex-climber half or quarter so thick and strong?

After a long time, sets of tiny buds appeared here and there among the extravagant foliage. Soon they opened into small flowers, miserable little things: they looked like flies' heads. 'How disappointed I should have been, and you would too, I hope, or Doyle and Wells have lived and writ in vain. One naturally expects a large, garish, sinister bloom, like a sea anemone, or a Chinese lantern, or a hippopotamus yawning, on any important orchid; and should it be an unclassified one as well, I think one has every right to insist on a sickly and overpowering scent into the bargain.

Mr. Mannering did not mind at all. Indeed, apart from his joy and happiness in being the discoverer and godfather of a new sort of orchid, he felt only a mild and scientific interest in the fact that the paltry blossoms were so very much like flies' heads. Could it be to attract other flies for food, or as fertilizers? But then, why like their heads?

It was a few days later that Cousin Jane's cat disappeared. This was a great blow to Cousin Jane, but Mr. Mannering was not, in his heart of hearts, greatly sorry. He was not fond of the cat, for he could not open the smallest chink in a glass roof, for ventilation, but that creature would squeeze through somehow, to enjoy the warmth, and in this way it had broken many a tender shoot. But before poor Cousin Jane had lamented two days, something happened that so

engrossed Mr. Mannering that he had no mind left at all with which to sympathize with her affliction, nor to make at breakfast kind and hypocritical inquiries after the lost cat. A strange new bud appeared on the orchid. It was clearly evident that there would be two quite different sorts of bloom on this one plant, as sometimes happens in such fantastic corners of the vegetable world, and that the new flower would be very different in size and structure from the earlier ones. It grew bigger and bigger, till it was as big as one's fist.

And just then, it could never have been more inopportune, an affair of the most unpleasant, the most distressing nature summoned Mr. Mannering to town. It was his wretched nephew, in trouble again: and this time so deeply and so very disgracefully that it took all Mr. Mannering's generosity, and all his influence too, to extricate the worthless young man. Indeed, as soon as he saw the state of affairs, he told the prodigal that this was the very last time he might expect assistance, that his vices and his ingratitude had long cancelled all affection between them, and that for this last helping hand he was indebted only to his mother's memory, and to no faith on the part of his uncle either in his repentance or his reformation. He wrote, moreover, to Cousin Jane, to relieve his feelings, telling her of the whole business, and adding that the only thing left to do was to cut the young man off entirely. He begged her, also, to send immediate news of any development on the part of his orchid.

When he got back to Torquay, Cousin Jane had disappeared. The situation was extremely annoying. Their only servant was a cook, who was very old, and very stupid, and very deaf. She suffered, besides, from an obsession, due to the fact that for many years Mr. Mannering had had no conversation with her in which he had not included an impressive reminder that she must always, no matter what might happen, keep the big kitchen stove up to a certain pitch of activity. For this stove, besides supplying the house

with hot water, heated the pipes in the 'Observation Ward,' to which the daily gardener who had charge of the other hot-houses had no access. By this time she had come to regard her duties as stoker as her chief *raison d'être*, and it was difficult to penetrate her deafness with any question which her stupidity and her obsession did not somehow transmute into an inquiry after the stove, and this, of course, was especially the case when Mr. Mannering spoke to her. All he could disentangle was what she had volunteered on first seeing him, that his cousin had not been seen for three days, that she had left without saying a word. Mr. Mannering was perplexed and annoyed, but, being a man of method, secretary, indeed, of his County's Lodge of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Orchid Growers, he thought it best to postpone further inquiries until he had refreshed himself a little after his long and tiring journey. A full supply of energy was necessary to extract any information from the old cook: besides, there was probably a note somewhere. It was only natural that before he went to his room, Mr. Mannering should peep into the hot-house, just to make sure that the wonderful orchid had come to no harm during the inconsiderate absence of Cousin Jane. As soon as he opened the door, his eyes fell upon the bud: it had changed in shape very considerably, and had increased in size to the bigness of a human head. It is no exaggeration to state that Mr. Mannering remained rooted to the spot, with his eyes fixed upon this wonderful bud, for fully five minutes.

But, you will ask, why did he not see her clothes on the floor? Well, as a matter of fact, to be perfectly plain and straightforward (it is a delicate point), there were no clothes on the floor. To avoid all shilly-shallying, I must tell you that Cousin Jane, though of course, she was thoroughly, entirely estimable in every respect, though she was well over forty, too, was given to the study, and in fact to the practice, of certain of the very latest ideas on the dual culture of the body and soul. Swedish, and German, neo-Greek and all that. You will understand, no doubt. And the orchid-house

was the warmest place available. I must proceed with the order of events.

Mr. Mannering at length withdrew his eyes from this stupendous bud, and (disciplined in his pleasures as all great souls are) decided that he must temporarily abandon this . . . this positive Peak in Darien, and devote his attention to the grey exigencies of everyday life. But although his body dutifully ascended the stairs, heart, mind and soul all remained, like the three kings of old, in adoration of the plant. Here we see another side to Mr. Mannering's character. Although he was philosophical to the point of insensibility over the miserable smallness of the earlier flowers, yet he was now as much gratified by the magnitude of the great new bud as you or I might be. Is not the orchid-grower a man with a heart - like you? Hence, it was not unnatural that Mr. Mannering, while in his bath, should be full of the most exalted visions of the blossoming of his heart's darling, his vegetable godchild. It would be the largest known, by far: complex as a dream, or dazzlingly simple. It would open like a dancer, or like the sun rising. Why, it might be opening at this very moment! At this thought Mr. Mannering could restrain himself no longer; he rose from the steamy water, and, wrapping his bath-towel robe about him, hurried down to the hot-house, scarcely staying to dry himself, though he was subject to colds.

The bud had not yet opened: it still reared its unbroken head among the glossy, fleshy foliage, and he now saw, what he had had no eyes for previously, how very exuberant that foliage had grown. Suddenly he realized with astonishment that this huge bud was not that which had appeared before he went away. That one had been lower down on the plant. Where was it now, then? Why, this new thrust and spread of foliage concealed it from him. He walked across, and discovered it. It had opened into a bloom. And as he looked at this bloom, his astonishment grew to stupefaction, one might say to petrification, for it is a fact that Mr.

Mannering remained rooted to the spot, with his eyes fixed on the flower, for fully fifteen minutes. The flower was an exact replica of the head of Cousin Jane's lost cat. The similitude was so exact, so lifelike, that Mr. Mannering's first movement, after the fifteen minutes, was to seize his bath-towel robe, to draw it about him, for he was a modest man, and the cat, though bought for a Tom, had proved to be quite the reverse. I relate this to show how much character, spirit, *presence*, call it what you will, there was upon this floral cat's face. But although he made to seize his bath-towel robe, it was too late: he could not move; the new lusty foliage had closed in unperceived, the too lightly dismissed tendrils were everywhere upon him: he gave a few weak cries and sank to the ground, and there, as the Mr. Mannering of ordinary life, he passes out of this story. Just fancy!

Mr. Mannering sank into a coma, into an insensibility so deep that a black eternity passed before the first faint elements of his consciousness reassembled themselves in his brain. For of his brain was the centre of a new bud being made. Indeed, it was two or three days before this at first almost shapeless and quite primitive lump of organic matter had become sufficiently mature to be called Mr. Mannering at all. These days, which passed quickly enough, in a certain mild, not unpleasant excitement, in the outer world, seemed to the dimly working mind within the bud to resume the whole history of the development of our species, in a great many epochal parts.

A process analogous to the mutations of the embryo was being enacted here. At last the entity which was thus being rushed down an absurdly foreshortened vista of the ages arrived, slowing up, into the foreground. It became recognizable. The Seven Ages of Mr. Mannering were presented, as it were, in a series of close-ups, as in an educational film; his consciousness settled and cleared; the bud was mature, ready to open. At this point, I believe, Mr. Mannering's state of mind was exactly that of a patient, who, struggling up from vague dreams, waking from under an anæsthetic,

asks plaintively, 'Where am I?' Then the bud opened, and he knew.

There was the hot-house, but seen from an unfamiliar angle; there, through the glass door, was his study, and there below him was the cat's head (Oh! *now* he knew) and there, and there beside him was Cousin Jane. He could not say a word, but then, neither could she. Perhaps it was as well. At the very least, he would have been forced to own that she had been in the right in an argument of long standing; she had always maintained that in the end no good would come of his preoccupation with 'those unnatural flowers.'

Yet it must be admitted that Mr. Mannering was not at first greatly put about by this extraordinary upheaval in his daily life. This, I think, was because he was interested, not only in private and personal matters, but in the wider and more general, one might say the biological, aspects of his metamorphosis: to the rest, simply because he *was* now a vegetable, he responded with a vegetable reaction. The impossibility of locomotion, for example, did not trouble him in the least, nor even the absence of body and limbs, any more than the cessation of that stream of rashers and tea, biscuits and glasses of milk, luncheon cutlets and so forth that had flowed in at his mouth for over fifty years, but which had now been reversed to a gentle, continuous, scarcely noticeable feeding from above. All the powerful influence of the physical upon the mental, therefore, inclined him towards tranquillity. But the physical is not all. Although no longer a man, he was still Mr. Mannering. Dear me! And from this anomaly, as soon as his scientific interest had subsided, issued a host of woes, mainly subjective in origin.

He was fretted, for instance, by the thought that he would now have no opportunity to name his orchid, nor to write a paper upon it, and, still worse, there grew up in his mind the abominable conviction that, as soon as his plight was discovered, it was he who would be named and classified, and that he himself would be the subject of a paper; possibly,

even, of comment and criticism in the lay press. Like all orchid collectors, he was excessively shy and sensitive, and in his present situation these qualities were very naturally exaggerated; so that the bare idea of such attentions brought him to the verge of wilting. Worse yet was the fear of being transplanted, thrust into some unfamiliar, draughty, probably public place. Being dug up! Ugh! A violent shudder pulsed through all the heavy foliage that sprang from Mr. Mannering's division of the plant. He awoke to consciousness of ghostly and remote sensations in the stem below, and in certain tufts of leaves that sprouted from it; they were somehow reminiscent of spine and heart and limbs. He felt quite a dryad.

In spite of all, however, the sunshine was very pleasant. The rich odour of hot, spicy earth filled the hot-house, from a special fixture on the hot-water pipes a little warm steam oozed into the air. Mr. Mannering began to abandon himself to a feeling of *laissez-aller*. Just then, up in the corner of the glass roof, at the ventilator, he heard a persistent buzzing. Soon the note changed from one of irritation to a more complacent sound; a bee had managed to find his way, after some difficulty, through one of the tiny chinks in the metal work. The visitor came drifting down and down through the still green air, as if into some sub-aqueous world, and he came to rest on one of those petals which were Mr. Mannering's eyebrows. Thence he commenced to explore one feature after another, and at last he settled heavily on the lower lip, which drooped under his weight and allowed him to crawl right into Mr. Mannering's mouth. This was quite a considerable shock, of course, but on the whole the sensation was neither as alarming nor as unpleasant as might have been expected; indeed, strange as it may sound, the appropriate word seemed to be something like . . . refreshing. Perhaps the little tongue had been coated.

But Mr. Mannering soon ceased his drowsy toying with the *môt juste*, when he saw the departed bee, after one or two

lazy circlings, settle directly upon the maiden lip of Cousin Jane. Ominous as lightning, a simple botanical principle flashed across the mind of her wretched relative. Which principle? It is only too well known. Even the very babes and sucklings are familiar with it. Is it not drummed into their jaded ears by parents and governesses, curates and the family doctor: is it not Exercise One in the principal subject on the kindergarten curriculum? Cousin Jane was aware of it also, although, being the product of an earlier age, she might have remained still blessedly ignorant had not her cousin, vain, garrulous, proselytizing fool, attempted for years past to interest her in the rudiments of botany. How the miserable man upbraided himself now!

He saw two bunches of leaves just below the flower tremble and flutter, and rear themselves painfully upward into the very likeness of two shocked and protesting hands. He saw the soft and orderly petals of his cousin's face ruffled and incarnadine with rage and embarrassment, then turn sickly as a gardenia with horror and dismay. He thought, absurdly enough, of York and Lancaster. But what was he to do? All the rectitude implanted by his careful training, all the chivalry proper to an orchid-collector, boiled and surged beneath a paralytically calm exterior. He positively travailed in the effort to activate the muscles of his face, to assume an expression of grief, manly contrition, helplessness in the face of fate, willingness to make all honourable amends, all suffused with the light of a vague but solacing optimism; but it was all in vain. When he had strained till his nerves seemed likely to tear under the tension, the only movement he could achieve was a trivial flutter of the left eyelid - worse than nothing.

This incident completely aroused Mr. Mannering from his vegetative lethargy. He rebelled against the limitations of the form into which he had thus been cast while subjectively he remained all too human. Was he not still at heart a man, with a man's hopes, ideals, aspirations? And capacity for suffering.

When dusk came, and the opulent and sinister shapes of the great plant dimmed to a suggestiveness more powerfully impressive than had been its bright noonday luxuriance, and the atmosphere of a tropical forest filled the orchid-house like an exile's dream, or the nostalgia of the saxophone; when the cat's whiskers drooped and even Cousin Jane's eyes slowly closed, the unhappy man remained wide awake, staring into the gathering darkness. Suddenly the light in the study was switched on. Two men entered the room. One of them was his lawyer, the other was his nephew.

'This is his study, as you know, of course,' said the wicked nephew. 'There's nothing here. I looked round when I came over on Wednesday.'

'Ah! well,' said the lawyer. 'It's a very queer business, an absolute mystery.' He had evidently said so more than once before; they must have been discussing matters in another room. 'Well, we must hope for the best. In the meantime, in all the circumstances, it's perhaps as well that you, as next-of-kin, should take charge of things here. We must hope for the best.'

Saying this, the lawyer turned, about to go, and Mr. Mannering saw a malicious smile overspread the young man's face. The uneasiness which had overcome him at first sight of his nephew was intensified to fear and trembling at the sight of this smile.

When he had shown the lawyer out, the nephew returned to the study and looked around with a lively and sinister satisfaction. Then he cut a caper on the hearthrug. Mr. Mannering thought he had never seen anything so diabolical as this solitary expression of the glee of a venomous nature, at the prospect of unchecked sway here whence he had been outcast, licence where he had been condemned. How vulgar petty triumph appeared, beheld thus; how disgusting petty spite, how appalling revengefulness and hardness of heart! He remembered suddenly that his nephew had been notable, in his repulsive childhood, for his cruelty to flies, tear-

ing their wings off, and for his barbarity towards cats. A sort of dew might have been noticed upon the good man's forehead. It seemed to him that his nephew had only to glance that way and all would be discovered, although he might have remembered that it was impossible to see from the lighted room into the darkness in the hot-house. His own vision of events inside the room was, of course, only too clear.

On the mantelpiece stood a large unframed photograph of Mr. Mannering. His nephew soon caught sight of this, and strode across to confront it with a triumphant and insolent sneer. 'What? You old Pharisee,' said he, 'taken her off for a trip to Brighton, have you? My God! How I hope you'll never come back! How I hope you've fallen over the cliffs, or got swept off by the tide or something! Anyway . . . I'll make hay while the sun shines. Ugh! you old skinflint, you!' And he reached forward his hand, on which the thumb held the middle finger bent and in check, and that finger, then released, rapped viciously upon the nose in the photograph. Then the usurping rascal left the room, and left all the lights on, presumably preferring the dining-room with its tantalus and cellarette to the scholarly austerities of the study.

All night long the glare of electric light from the study fell full upon Mr. Mannering and his Cousin Jane, like the glare of a cheap and artificial sun. You, who have seen at midnight, in the park, a few insomniac asters standing stiff and startled under an arc-light, all their weak colour bleached out of them by the drenching chemical radiance, neither asleep nor awake, but held fast in a tense, a neurasthenic trance, you can form an idea of how the night passed with this unhappy pair.

And towards morning an incident occurred, trivial in itself, no doubt, but sufficient then and there to add the last drop to poor Cousin Jane's discomfiture, and to her relative's embarrassment and remorse. Along the edge of the great earth-box in which the orchid was planted, ran a small

black mouse. It had wicked red eyes, a naked evil snout, and huge repellent ears, queer as a bat's. This creature ran straight over the lower leaves of Cousin Jane's part of the plant. It was simply appalling: the stringy main-stem writhed like a hair on a coal-fire, the leaves contracted in an agonized spasm, like seared mimosa; the terrified lady nearly uprooted herself in her convulsive horror. I think she would actually have done so, had not the mouse hurried on past her.

But it had not gone more than a foot or so when it looked up and saw, bending over it, and seeming positively to bristle with life, that flower which had once been called Tib. There was a breathless pause. The mouse was obviously paralysed with terror, the cat could only look and long. Suddenly the more human watchers saw a sly frond of foliage curve softly outward and close in behind the hypnotized creature. Cousin Jane, who had been thinking exultantly, 'Well, now it'll go away and never, never, never come back,' suddenly became aware of hideous possibilities. Summoning all her energy, and you must remember that she had been 'out' some days longer than her cousin, and so had much more control of her leaves, she achieved a spasmodic flutter, enough to break the trance that held the mouse, so that, like a clockwork toy, it swung round and fled. But already the fell arm of the orchid had cut off its retreat, the mouse leapt straight at it, like a flash five tendrils at the end caught the fugitive and held it fast, and soon its body dwindled and was gone. Now the heart of Cousin Jane was troubled with horrid fears, and slowly and painfully she turned her weary face first to one side, then to the other, in a fever of anxiety as to where the new bud would appear. A sort of sucker, green and sappy, which twisted lightly about her main stem, and reared a blunt head, much like a tip of asparagus, close to her own, suddenly began to swell in the most suspicious manner. She squinted at it, fascinated and appalled. Could it be her imagination? It was not. . . . But, after all, what are these trifles?

Next evening the door opened again, and again the nephew entered the study. This time he was alone, and it was evident that he had come straight from table. He carried in his hand a decanter of whisky capped by an inverted glass. Under his arm was a syphon. His face was distinctly flushed, and such a smile as is often seen in saloon bars played about his lips. These lips he occasionally pursed, while simultaneously his cheeks became a little distended: then they would suddenly collapse. He put down his burdens, and, turning to Mr. Mannering's cigar cabinet, produced a bunch of keys which he proceeded to try upon the lock, muttering vindictively at each abortive attempt, until it opened, when he helped himself from the best of its contents. Annoying as it was to witness this insolent appropriation of his property, and mortifying to see the contempt with which the cigar was smoked, the good gentleman found deeper cause for uneasiness in the thought that, with the possession of the keys, his abominable nephew had access to every private corner that was his.

At present, however, the usurper seemed indisposed to carry on investigations; he splashed a great deal of whisky into the tumbler, and, relaxing into an attitude of extravagant comfort, proceeded to revolt his unseen audience by an exhibition of those animal grossnesses in which a certain type of man is wont to indulge when he fancies himself alone with his Maker. I mean wide, shameless yawning, sucking the teeth, or picking them with a finger-nail, eructations, hawking, spitting even. But after a while, the young man began to tire of his own company; he had not yet had time to gather any of his pot-house companions into his uncle's home, and repeated resource to the whisky bottle only increased his longing for something to relieve the monotony. His eye fell upon the door of the orchid-house. Sooner or later it was bound to have come to pass. Does this thought greatly console the condemned man when the fatal knock sounds upon the door of his cell? No. Nor were the hearts of the trembling pair in the hot-house at all succoured by the reflection.

As the nephew fumbled with the handle of the glass door, Cousin Jane slowly raised two fronds of leaves that grew on each side, high up on her stem, and sank her troubled head behind them. Mr. Mannering observed, in a sudden rapture of hope, that by this device she was fairly well concealed from any casual glance. Hastily he strove to follow her example. Unfortunately, he had not yet gained sufficient control of his – his *limbs*? – and all his tortured efforts could not raise them beyond an agonized horizontal. The door had opened, the nephew was feeling for the electric light switch just inside. It was a moment for one of the superlative achievements of panic. Mr. Mannering was well equipped for the occasion. Suddenly, at the cost of indescribable effort, he succeeded in raising the right frond, not straight upwards, it is true, but in a series of painful jerks along a curve outward and backward, and ascending by slow degrees till it attained the position of an arm held over the possessor's head from behind. Then, as the light flashed on, a spray of leaves at the very end of this frond spread out into a fan, rather like a very fleshy horse-chestnut leaf in structure, and covered the anxious face below. What a relief! And now the nephew advanced into the orchid-house, and now the hidden pair simultaneously remembered the fatal presence of the cat. Simultaneously also, their very sap stood still in their veins. The nephew was walking along by the plant. The cat, a sagacious beast, 'knew' with the infallible intuition of its kind that this was an idler, a parasite, a sensualist, gross and brutal, disrespectful to age, insolent to weakness, barbarous to cats. Therefore it remained very still, trusting to its low and somewhat retired position on the plant, and to protective mimicry and such things, and to the half-drunken condition of the nephew, to avoid his notice. But all in vain.

"What?" said the nephew. "What, a cat?" And he raised his hand to offer a blow at the harmless creature. Something in the dignified and unflinching demeanour of his victim must have penetrated into even his besotted mind,

for the blow never fell, and the bully, a coward at heart as bullies invariably are, shifted his gaze from side to side to escape the steady, contemptuous stare of the courageous cat. Alas! his eye fell on something glimmering whitely behind the dark foliage. He brushed aside the intervening leaves that he might see what it was. It was Cousin Jane.

'Oh! Ah!' said the young man, in great confusion. 'You're back. But what are you hiding there for?'

His sheepish stare became fixed, his mouth opened in bewilderment: then the true condition of things dawned upon his mind. Most of us would have at once instituted some attempts at communication, or at assistance of some kind, or at least have knelt down to thank our Creator that we had, by His grace, been spared such a fate, or perhaps have made haste from the orchid-house to ensure against accidents. But alcohol had so inflamed the young man's hardened nature that he felt neither fear nor awe nor gratitude, and as for any spirit of helpfulness, that was as far as ever from his hard, revengeful heart. As he grasped the situation a devilish smile overspread his face.

'Ha! Ha! Ha!' said he, 'but where's the old man?'

He peered about the plant, looking eagerly for his uncle. In a moment he had located him, and raising the inadequate visor of leaves, discovered beneath it the face of our hero, troubled with a hundred bitter emotions.

'Hullo, Narcissus!' said the nephew.

A long silence ensued. The nephew was so pleased that he could not say a word. He rubbed his hands together, and licked his lips, and stared and stared as a child might at a new toy.

'You're properly up a tree now,' he said. 'Yes, the tables are turned now all right, aren't they? Ha! Ha! Do you remember the last time we met?'

A flicker of emotion passed over the face of the suffering blossom, betraying consciousness.

'Yes, you can hear what I say,' added the tormentor. 'Feel too, I expect. What about that?'

As he spoke, he stretched out his hand, and, seizing a delicate frill of fine, silvery filaments that grew as whiskers grow round the lower half of the flower, he administered a sharp tug. The result would have interested that ingenious experimenter, Sir J. C. Rose. Without pausing to note, however, even in the interests of science, the subtler shades of his uncle's reaction, content with the general effect of that devastating wince, the wretch chuckled with satisfaction, and, taking a long pull from the reeking butt of the stolen cigar, puffed the vile fumes straight into the victim's centre. The Brute!

'How do you like that, John the Baptist?' he asked with a leer. 'Good for the blight, you know. Just what you want!'

Something rustled upon his coat sleeve. Looking down, he saw a long stalk, well adorned with the fatal tendrils, groping its way over the arid and unsatisfactory surface. In a moment it had reached his wrist, he felt it fasten, but knocked it off as one would a leech, before it had time to establish its hold.

'Ugh!' said he, 'so that's how it happens, is it? I think I'll keep outside till I get the hang of things a bit. I don't want to be made an Aunt Sally of. Though I shouldn't think they could get you with your clothes on.' Struck by a sudden thought he looked from his uncle to Cousin Jane, and from Cousin Jane back to his uncle again. He scanned the floor, and saw a single crumpled bath-towel robe lying in the shadow.

'Why?' he said, '*well!* . . . Haw! Haw! Haw!' And with an odious backward leer, he made his way out of the orchid-house.

Mr. Mannerling felt that his suffering was capable of no increase. Yet he dreaded the morrow. His fevered imagination patterned the long night with waking nightmares, utterly fantastic visions of humiliation and torture. Torture! It was absurd, of course, for him to fear cold-blooded atrocities on the part of his nephew, but how he dreaded some outrageous whim that might tickle the youth's sense

of humour, and lead him to *any* wanton^d freak, especially if he were drunk at the time. He thought of slugs and snails, espaliers and topiary. Oh! Oh! Oh! If only the monster would rest content with insults and mockery, with wasting his substance, ravaging his cherished possessions before his eyes, with occasional pulling at the whiskers, even! Then it might be possible to turn gradually from all that still remained in him of man, to subdue the passions, no longer to admire or desire to go native, as it were, relapsing into the Nirvana of a vegetable dream. But in the morning he found this was not so easy.

In came the nephew, and, pausing only to utter the most perfunctory of jeers at his relatives in the glass-house, he sat at the desk and unlocked the top drawer. He was evidently in search of money, his eagerness betrayed that; no doubt he had run through all he had filched from his uncle's pockets, and had not yet worked out a scheme for getting direct control of his bank account. However, the drawer held enough to cause the scoundrel to rub his hands with satisfaction, and, summoning the housekeeper, to bellow into her ear a reckless order upon the wine and spirit merchant.

'Get along with you,' he shouted, when he had at last made her understand. 'I shall have to get someone a bit more on the spot to wait on me; I can tell you that. Yes,' he added to himself as the poor old woman hobbled away, deeply hurt by his bullying manner, 'yes, a nice little parlour-maid . . . a nice little parlour-maid.'

He hunted in the Buff Book for the number of the local registry office. That afternoon he interviewed a succession of maidservants in his uncle's study. Those that happened to be plain, or too obviously respectable, he treated curtly and coldly; they soon made way for others. It was only when a girl was attractive (according to the young man's depraved tastes, that is), and also bore herself in a fast or brazen manner, that the interviews were at all prolonged. In these cases the nephew would conclude in a fashion that

left no doubt at all in the minds of any of his auditors as to his real intentions. Once, for example, leaning forward, he took the girl by the chin, saying with an odious smirk, "There's no one else but me, and so you'd be treated just like one of the family; d'you see, my dear?" To another he would say, slipping his arm round her waist, "Do you think we shall get on well together? Will you make me nice and cosy and comfortable, eh?" He addressed one as 'Baby,' another as 'Chicken.' I can't imagine what poor Cousin Jane must have thought!

After this conduct had sent two or three in confusion from the room, there entered a young person of the most regrettable description, one whose character, betrayed as it was in her meretricious finery, her crude cosmetics and her tinted hair, showed yet more clearly in florid gesture and too facile smile. The nephew lost no time in coming to an arrangement with this creature. Indeed, her true nature was so obvious that the depraved young man only went through the farce of an ordinary interview as a sauce to his anticipations, enjoying the contrast between conventional dialogue and unbridled glances. She was to come next day. Mr. Mannering feared more for his unhappy cousin than for himself. "What scenes may she not have to witness," he thought, "that yellow cheek of hers to incarnadine?" If he only could have said a few words!

But that evening, when the nephew came to take his ease in the study, it was obvious that he was far more under the influence of liquor than had been the case before. His face, flushed patchily by the action of the spirits, wore a sullen sneer, an ominous light burned in that bleared eye, he muttered savagely under his breath. Clearly this fiend in human shape was what is known as 'fighting drunk,' clearly some trifle had set his vile temper in a blaze.

It is interesting to note, even at this stage, a sudden change in Mr. Mannering's reactions. They now seemed entirely egotistical, and were to be elicited only by stimuli directly associated with physical matters. The nephew

kicked a hole in a screen in his drunken fury, he flung a burning cigar-end down on the carpet, he scratched matches on the polished table. His uncle witnessed this with the calm of one whose sense of property and of dignity has become numbed and paralysed; he felt neither fury nor mortification. Had he, by one of those sudden strides by which all such development takes place, approached much nearer to his goal, complete vegetation? His concern for the threatened modesty of Cousin Jane, which had moved him so strongly only a few hours earlier, must have been the last dying flicker of exhausted altruism; that most human characteristic had faded from him. He felt that relief which certain sick people feel when they first notice the influence of a drug as an irregular blur on their consciousness of pain, or which unhappy lovers enjoy when they first rub their hands and skip about the room in a morning ecstasy of (probably illusory) indifference. But instead of running to the glass and rapturously greeting himself as a long-lost friend, as this latter class generally do, Mr. Mannering soberly prepared to bid his personality farewell. The change, however, in its present stage, was not an unmixed blessing. Narrowing in from the wider and more expressly human regions of his being, his consciousness now left outside its focus not only pride and altruism, which had been responsible for much of his woe, but fortitude and detachment also, which, with quotation from the Greeks, had been his support before the whole battery of his distresses. Moreover, within its constricted circle, his ego was not reduced but concentrated; his serene, flower-like indifference towards the ill-usage of his furniture was balanced by the absorbed, flower-like singlemindedness of his terror at the thought of similar ill-usage directed towards himself. It is important now to appreciate this white, intense light of Mr. Mannering's apprehensions.

What a strange shock it would be, if, shall we say, in the third act of *Hamlet*, the mind, dispread in contemplation of diverse forces converging harmoniously on some still-distant

consummation, was suddenly *jabbed* (as a sea anemone by a stick) by the spectacle of the King treading by chance upon Hamlet's toe, and causing him such annoyance, that, in a flash . . .

Inside the study the nephew still fumed and swore. On the mantelpiece stood an envelope, addressed in Mr. Man-nering's handwriting to Cousin Jane. In it was the letter he had written from Town, describing his nephew's disgraceful conduct. The young man's eye fell upon this, and, unscrupulous, impelled by idle curiosity, he took it up and drew out the letter. As he read, his face grew a hundred times blacker than before.

'What?' he muttered, ' . . . a mere racecourse cad . . . a worthless vulgarian . . . a scoundrel of the sneaking sort' . . . and what's this? . . . ' . . . cut him off absolutely' . . . What?' said he, with a horrifying oath, '*would* you cut me off absolutely? Two can play at that game, you old devil!'

And he snatched up a large pair of scissors that lay on the desk, and burst into the hot-house.

Among fish, the dory, they say, screams when it is seized upon by man; among insects, the caterpillar of the death's-head moth is capable of a still small shriek of terror; in the vegetable world, only the mandrake could voice its agony - till now.

The Provost's Tale

BY A. J. CRONIN

It was Hogmanay night – eve of Scotland's greatest feast – and at the Philosophical Club of Levenford a full assembly prepared to see the New Year in. Members relaxed in the presence of their guests, and, abandoning all thought of profound debate, consented to pass the hours in amicable intercourse. Many songs had been sung and many stories told, and in between the talk flowed easily. Then, midway through the evening, a lull fell within the bright and cheerful room. Old John Leckie had spoken.

Leckie, who had been Provost of the Borough more than thirty years ago, was now an aged, taciturn man of eighty, who came to the club only on special occasions – to honour it with the presence of its oldest member. Then he would sit in his special corner – silent, dignified, and apparently remote.

But at the right moment he would speak, and now, cutting across a conversation which maligned a recent change in the Levenford weather, he had said:

'You're speaking about the thaw. Well, I can tell ye a story about a thaw that happened lang syne, and it was and it wasna to do with the weather.'

A polite murmur of encouragement rose from the gathering, at which he paused, took his pipe from his lips, fixed a rheumy, reminiscent eye upon his listeners, and held them as he spoke.

There's not many here this night will mind of Martha Lang, but in her time no woman in this borough was better

kenned. About the back end of last century she kept a small tobacconist's shop at the corner of Church Street and Dobbie's Loan.

'Twas all done away with, that property, when they widened the road to fetch the tram-cars to the town more nor twenty year ago; but anyway, that was where Martha had her shop.

'Black Martha' some called her, and others 'Bible Martha,' but that was aye behind her back, for none would dare to take a liberty with Martha Lang before her face.

She wasn't a tall body - rather to the contrar', in fact. Her hair was dark, and clenched back tight from her brow, and she was aye dressed plain as plain in a black serge gown, so that you might think she was a woman you'd never look twice at.

Ay, like a shadow she was in the dimness of her own shop, but her spirit was no shadow. She had a look on her pale, narrow face that struck you and daunted you - a kind of tight-lipped, bitter look it was, and it burned out of her dark-browed eye like fire. Some folks were feared of her and many hated her, but all agreed that she was a just and righteous woman. Ay, she was a saved woman, and the proud look of it was in her eye.

The shop wasna muckle to look at. Its window was small with panes of greenish blown glass, and that low it seemed to cower down beneath the figure of an East Indianman that stuck out above it; and all that it held was three yellow canisters that stood solemn-like in a row. The door was stiff, and went 'ping' when ye opened it.

Inside, the place was murky. 'Twas like an auld apothecary's shop with its counter and small brass scale and its row of blue and white delf jars, but 'twas silent, somehow, and severe - too cold in winter, too hot in summer - a place not made to linger in.

Next to the shop was the kitchen of Martha's house. It had a window that opened to Dobbie's Loan and one in the dividing wall - a kind of keek-hole, ye might say - that let

ye see from the shop to the kitchen or the other way about, as the case might be.

The kitchen was just ordinar'. A big dresser against the wall with blue china on it, three pewter covers hanging on the wall with the fire in the range glinting on them dourly, a wag-at-the-wall clock, twa texts, a table scrubbed to a driven whiteness, some straight chairs, and a long, low, horsehair sofa – that made up the tale of the furnishings. And out of the room a flight of narrow steps arose, steep as any ladder, to the twa bedrooms above.

At the time I'm speaking of Martha's husband had been dead and coffined and buried these fifteen years. A long time! She had been left with one bairn, a boy called Geordie. He was three year auld when Martha was widowed, and so she had the upbringin' of him. And bring him up she did! Strict wāsna the name for the way she handled him. Never a glint of human affection kindled her bleak eye. To those that dared tax her on the matter, she had the answer pat, and she would throw Ecclesiastes xii. and 8 right intil their teeth. Ay, bitter and harsh she was with him in everything.

Well, that was Martha and her son, and at the time the fearsome thing I'm going to speak of came about Geordie was turned eighteen years auld. He was a strapping lad, with wide shoulders and arms that dangled down into his big red hands; and he had a pleasant, open face. Yet a kind of saft and simple look was in the face, as though some of the spunk had been leathered out of him when he was younger. An apprentice engineer he was, learning his trade in the shipyard.

'Twas the winter of 1895. A black frost had grippit the land. The roads were like iron; the pond was bearing; twal' degrees it was some nights; in the morning a skin of ice on the ewer, and your brose cauld before ye supped them.

Twa days before Christmas, I was in Martha's shop for my ounce of the usual about half-past six in the evening,

when Geordie came out of the kitchen. Whenever Martha set eye on him she put down the lid on the jar sharp.

'Where are ye going?' says she, in the hard way she had. 'I thought I would take a turn down to the pond,' he answered mild-like, ye ken. He had his skates swingin' by the straps in his hand.

'Were ye not out last night?' quoth she again, 'and can ye find no more profitable work to do?'

He made some excuse about the exercise being fine, but all the time her glower never lifted. Then all at once she shifted her eyes. It was as if the sight of him scauried her.

'Be in before the clock chaps nine, then,' she said sternly, 'and watch the company ye keep.'

Well, Geordie trots out, and as his way was mine we went down the road together. For all the cold it was a braw night. The lamps in the street had white rings round their globes like hoar; the moon was in its first quarter, and it was pinned high up in the velvet sky like a brooch; the jingle of Geordie's skates – they had been his father's, mind ye, and that was how he came by them – made fine, clear music.

He was fond of the skating, ye see, and he was a bonny, bonny skater. Sure enough, there was none to equal him in Levenford. At the corner of the Common we said good-night, and off he went to the ice, and home I went to my own fireside.

I didna see Geordie for twa or three days. Christmas went by, and all the time the frost continued. It couldna last like that was what folks said, stamping their feet as they talked for a short second at the Cross; it would crack quick, like all these bitter frosts. But last it did. Hard and fast it lasted, and at the middle of the week word came through from Darroch that the Loch was frozen over, a thing that hadna happened for near enough seven year.

Well, on that same day I was in Martha's shop. Earlier than my usual, I was, and the Yard horn had just blown for half-past five. I had pouched my ounce, and paid for't, and

was just having twa words with Martha – not that I took much pleasure in that, but as Provost then it behoved me more than ordinar' to keep on the richt side of Martha's bitter tongue.

She was at her endless knitting ahint the counter, and I was standin' in the far corner, when 'Ping!' the door swings open, and Geordie comes in. I was in the shadow, more nor less, and so full was he of what he was going to say that he didna see me, and straight out he bursts, 'The Loch's frozen, mother, and there's grand ice as far as Ardmurren island.'

'And what benefit is that to you or to me?' raps out Martha, knit, knitting away.

Geordie looked down at his big boots, glaikit-like.

'There's the race,' he jerks out.

'The race!' quoth she, sharp, as though she doubted her own hearing. And she lays down the knitting, and looks straight at him with a black stare.

'You know, mother, for the Winton Antlers,' Geordie went fumblin' on. 'They're wantin' me to gang in. Do ye not mind about it?'

Now I kenned what Geordie was driving at. The race ower the ice, he meant, from Markinch, round the island of Ardmurren, and back again. 'Twas a historic race, open to the countryside, instituted by the fourth Earl of Winton lang syne – some say 'twas first done when Rob Roy was in his prime – and the Earl had gien a kind of trophy for the prize, a head of antlers mounted on oak, above a silver shield. Though 'twas seldom that it could take place, the auld custom had been keepit up and some made muckle o't.

Anyway, I could see that Martha jaloused what her son meant, for she looked at him fiercely, and cried, 'Have ye taken leave of your senses?'

'But I'm picked as the best in the toun,' Geordie explained, 'and it's on Hogmanay Saturday. I needna miss my work. It's – it's an honour.'

'Honour, forsooth,' bursts out Martha. 'Black dishonour,

ye should say. Are ye still a bairn, that ye know not what this thing is? A meeting for the godless of the countryside! Brawling and drunkenness, amangst corrupt and sinful men. And, above all, a race, with the workers of iniquity wagerin' siller upon the winner. Oh! I have mind of it from my younger days before grace came to me.'

She made an effort, and calmed herself.

'No, no! You'll be party to no such mockery in the fair face of God's daylight.'

'But, mother, I'll gamble none and I'll drink none,' Georgie pleaded. 'I'm only wantin' to skate for the toun.'

'Can ye touch pitch and remain undefiled?' cries Martha.

Georgie's lip hung down like a bairn's.

'What way are ye so down on me?' he mumbled. 'You treat me like I was a dog.'

A spasm tightened Martha's face.

'Go in!' she cried loudly, pointing to the kitchen. 'You'll go to no race! And black, burning shame on you that would dare to lift your voice against your mother!'

He gien her a kind of dejeckit look, and, for all his size, put down his head and went shouldering off as she had bid him. When he had gane, Martha drew in her breath between her teeth. Her face was grey, yet kind of triumphant, like the face of a woman that chastises herself and draws out o't a bitter ecstasy.

Well, the week went on, and so did the frost, and towards the week's end it seemed to stiffen its grasp like the last spasm of a dying man. On the eve of Hogmanay a few thin snowflakes came waverin' doun out of the numb sky. Folks prophesied a white end for the auld year, but the morning of the year's last day broke clear, and all that was left of the snow was some that had sifted into corners and crannies like sugar. The sun came up, round and red, as if 'twere shamed for staying so long away. But as it mounted higher in the sky it shone bright, ay, bright and bonny.

'Twas the day of the race, this, mark ye. Though I hadna

much interest in the matter, what with one thing and another – the day being so braw and the feel of Hogmanay in the air – when Baillie Weir asked me to drive up to Markinch with him in his new gig I said I'd go. And so we set out after dinner. We came to Markinch all too soon. The single street of the village – by ordinar' so empty a dog could sleep safe in the middle o't – was black with folks moving and laughing and pushing on to the rough white ice that edged the shore. Hereabouts on the frozen loch they had put up some booths, and round about these stalls the crowd was gathered, in fine fettle, ye may guess.

Near enough two hundred folks were clustered on the ice – a large gathering considering, and a gathering not without its notables.

When the time of the race drew near, the gaiety and excitement louped up the higher. At three o'clock the competitors came out from their tent on to the clear space which formed the starting point – six young men, the picked skaters of the district – and began to skate about, sweeping in circles, and taking short dashes up the course to loosen their limbs.

I tell ye plump and plain that when I saw them my eyes near drappit out of my heid, for there amangst them was Geordie. I could scarcely credit it, but so it was. Geordie Lang was there! He had a queer, nervous air about him, as if he was gey and sorry he was there. I've told ye he was a big, saft lad, and now there was a scared, muddled look on him as if he didna know how in all the world he had got to Markinch.

Anyway, the Baillie and myself went ower and spoke to Geordie.

'How do you feel for it, Geordie?' Weir spiered. I hadna let on to Weir about what I knew, and he wasna a customer of Martha's in any case.

'I'm not bad, thank ye, Mister Weir,' says Geordie, in a pithless voice.

'Are ye all set? Ye couldna have a better day for't.'
'Day or no day, I'll never win it,' said Geordie, in the same fushionless manner.

The Baillie laughed, and slapped Geordie on the back. 'It's half the battle to have gotten round your mother,' said I, quiet-like. 'I was feared she wouldna let ye come.'

Geordie made no reply. He heard me but pretended not to; but I saw his sandy eyebrows gie a quick twitch. I kenned then that he had slipped out his gear and rin awa' to the race against Martha's will. And so it was. He had just come on straight from his work, and hadna been home for his dinner. Fond, fond of the skating was Geordie, ye see. But losh! I felt heart sorry for the lad, thinkin' on the kind of homecoming he wad have, win or no win, with the Antlers or without them.

In the meantime Weir was speaking.

'Watch yourself when you're roundin' the island,' counselled the Baillie, pointing his finger. 'Don't swing too wide or you'll lose distance.'

The three of us looked towards Ardmurren, which rose like a dark hillock in a wide deserted plain. Three miles away it was, out in the middle of the loch, but in that bright light it showed so clear we could near see the scarlet clusters upon the distant holly trees.

'And keep well up the middle,' continued the Baillie, waving his hand as though he kenned all about it. 'You'll get the smoothest ice there.'

Geordie nodded his head listlessly, as though to say, 'I'm in for it now, anyway,' but what he did say was, 'I'll do my best. I can do no more.'

'Good luck to ye then, lad,' cried Weir; and as Geordie moved off what could I do but say the same?

Well, by this time they were preparing for the start, the six men lined up – they had drawn their places by pulling straws – the crowd quiet and eager. Geordie was leanin' forward with his lips thegither, and I could see the cold

sweat on his brow. Right reason or none, it gied me a grue to look at him. I could hardly keep my eyes off him.

Twa of the other skaters I kenned by name. The man in the middle – Big Callum, they called him – was an aethlete who had won medals for tossing the caber, no less, at the Luss Games and he didna seem to be carin' a bit. And next to him was Dewar a lang strip of a callant who was tightening his belt and chewing tobacco to steady himself. The other three lads at the end of the line were not accounted to have muckle chance, but by the looks of them they were going to try.

Well, they were ready at last. Colquhoun, the keeper, who was starting the race, put his shot-gun to his shoulder, and raised the muzzle towards the sky. The crowd held its breath. 'Are ye ready, lads?' shouts Colquhoun. I saw Georgie clench his teeth, and knot up his big red hands, then 'Bang!' went the gun. The skates crunched into the ice. They were off.

The crowd roared. The start was a good one, and the six lads shot down the course spaced even, in a straight rank. Ower the broad open space they swept, skimming like a flight of birds across a glassy sea, and the screele of their skates had a sound like the whistle of wings.

'A fine, fair start!' shouted someone. 'There's nothing in it.'

No, there was nothing in it, for the first mile; then in a gradual kind of fashion Callum began to draw away from the rest. He wasna a bonny skater but he was powerful, and he lunged forrit with savage thrusts of his strong legs.

'Callum's ahead! He's got it by ten yards!' bawled out the head-keeper, who had his glass to his eye.

The cry of Callum was ta'en up.

'Dewar's second!' shouted Colquhoun again, 'and the rest a' bunched thegither!'

Well, they went like this for another mile; then they drew near to Ardmurren, driving to it like an arrow to the target. They were there, in a long column now, out of which the

six of them flashed round in turn. A kind of sigh, like a sough of wind, swept up from the crowd as they swept out of sight. Then there was a fresh yell as the first man swung into view. 'Callum's round first! Callum's ahead!'

Aside me Baillie Weir was on his tiptoes. A red-faced man at the best of times, he was purple now.

'Did ye notice?' he cries at me. 'Lang took the best o' the bend. He's inside now, like I telled him.'

Away, far, far, I could see that Geordie was lyin' third, behind Dewar and Callum. The pace was ower good for the rest of them. They had tailed a long distance behind. But Geordie was goin' well, with an easy swing of his lanky legs. There's no doubt but that he was a bonny, bonny skater.

All the time the crowd was in a regular stir; but somehow I didna feel excited. Something hung ower me; I couldna just explain what it was or how it was, but half-troubled I felt and half-feared.

Well, on they came, getting nearer and nearer. Half-way home, ye could see, even at the distance, that Callum was tiring. Dewar was pressing him, close on his heels, coming up with the short, running style he had. Callum spurted but couldna shake the other off. Neck and neck Dewar and Callum came tearin' along. Then Callum began to flag. The crowd was in a fever – the one half crying Callum's name and the other Dewar's – so ta'en up with the twa o' them, they forgot about Geordie. But the Baillie had his eye on Lang.

'Look at him, will ye?' he bawls out. 'He's coming up!' And sure enough Geordie lengthened his lang legs, and up he came like a clap of wind.

The folks from Levenford that wanted their man to win went wild with excitement.

'Geordie!' they roared. 'Come on, Geordie! Come on!'

Well, Geordie couldna hear them, but he did come on, and before ye could blink an eye he flew past both Callum

and Dewar, so quick that they seemed to drop backwards from him. Twa, five, ten yards ahead he was. Ay, at a mile from home he was near twenty yards to the fore.

'Geordie! Geordie Lang!' roared the crowd, cheering and tossing their bonnets.

Well, as I have told ye – and the stricken truth it is – midst all the shoutin' I had a sore oppression on me. And the louder they shouted the waur it grew. Whether it was the thought of Martha or that strange look I had seen on Geordie's face, I canna tell, but, as God's my witness, I had the cold fear that something awfu' was going to come about. And come about it did.

At the half-mile from home, when Geordie was away in the front o' the others, suddenly and without warnin' there came a crack that would have made your heart stand still, a fearsome sound that was like the crack o' doom, that cut the cheerin' like it had been severed.

God knows there's been many a story about breakin' ice and drookit skaters, but this was different as hell from heaven.

With these very eyes I saw it, and the memory still gars me shudder. The ice broke, and Geordie Lang went through it like a stane. The ane minute he was skimming like a bird – the next he was gane through a jaggy hole, out of which the black water slathered like cankered bluid. The others coming behind swerved away like things demented. Geordie alone went down.

It all happened in a second before ye could draw breath. A gasp, then a groan, went up the crowd; then a fearsome shout of horror. Weir's red face whitened like a clout.

'God Almighty!' cried Colquhoun, and he flung his gun ahint him, and started racing up the ice. Many a one was frichted, and there was a great rush to the shore, but some of us followed the keeper.

Oh, it was a dreadful, dreadful business. When we reached the spot there wasna a sign of Geordie, and when we tried to draw near the broken edge, a crackin' started

that would have daunted the stoutest heart. Out they rushed from the village with ropes and a ladder, but not a sign of Geordie could we see. Then Callum, that had been in the race, tore off his skates. He had kenned Geordie well, and now he was frantic-like with grief.

'I'll get him,' he shouts. 'I'll get him!'

Well, they tied a rope around Callum, and after he had skimmed along the ladder, into that icy water he went. 'Twas the bravest thing I've ever seen. Once he went down, then twice, then once again. And the third time he came up - his face pale, his teeth chatterin' in his heid, his hair sleekit ower his brow, and he had Geordie in his arms.

Ye never heard such a shout as was lifted then. But that was the pity o't, for 'twas no use at all, at all. Geordie was dead. We tried a' things when we got him to the bank, every mortal thing, for an hour on end, but 'twas all useless. Gae'n doun he must have bashed his head upon the ice, but, whatever the cause, there he lay, cold and lifeless on the loch shore.

Oh, it was a weary business, and there was a terrible to-do. One said one thing, and one said another. A great outcry rose against Colquhoun, who had been made responsible for the arrangements and had said that the course was fit. Distracted, the keeper was, and he kept swearing to me he had been twice to Ardmurren that very mornin'. Ay and so he had. But he'd never ta'en thought to go round the island and come back by the middle. That's where the ice was thinnest ye see; and the heat of the sun had just finished it.

Well what was done was done, and that was all about it; and it was neither time nor place for casting hard words about. And as Provost I had my say. I silenced them all, and the upshot was that poor Geordie's body was put on a farm wagon, and covered with due reverence. Then with Weir's gig in front, off we started on the drive back to Levenford.

God! When ye think on how we came spankin' out in the sunshine, that goin' back was weary, weary wark. Never a single word passed between the Baillie and myself the whole road back. Ye see there was Martha to be thought of now; ay, and the telling of her. Not that I feared her grief. No. I'm an auld man now, and can speak plain. I feared the black bitterness of her tongue.

Well, when we drew near to Levenford, the sky had clouded over and a fine smir of rain had come on. Ye may well guess I had little relish for my task, and when we turned into Church Street my eye louped when I saw the parish minister walking slowly along the pavement. It was just that hour of the Saturday when he went to Martha's and quick as look at him I cried out to him to stop.

The minister was a small spectacled man, with a stoop; a man fond of the book-learning, but a good man he was for all that, ay, both in the pulpit and out of it. He wasna one to flinch, and when he saw 'twas his duty to go to Martha, then he puts his teeth together, and marched with me to the shop.

Well, I make no pretence of bein' what I'm not. I was fair shaken with what I had seen upon the loch, and I had no stomach for muckle more. When the minister and myself went into that shop my heart was thump, thumping against my ribs like a hammer.

Martha was there right enough; standing ahint her counter, waiting for the son that had disobeyed her. Ye could see from the look in her eye that she was ready to chastise him – not with whips but with scorpions. Ay, and before we could speak, she let out at us. Seeing us together she jaloused in her wrang-headed fashion that we had come to plead for Geordie.

'It's no use, minister,' she cries out, 'there's no use your comin' to ask me to let him off. He maun dree his own weird.'

A kind of shiver went through me as I heard her.

'Martha, Martha woman,' says the minister in a quiet voice, 'ye must forgive your son.'

'Not till he goes on his bended knees,' she rasps out; 'not till he begs my forgiveness.' Her eyes glowered at him. But the minister didna flinch.

'I charge you, Martha Lang, to forgive your son,' says he again; 'and do it now or you may regret it all your born days.'

A twisted look drew ower Martha's face, and she flung out, 'Not till I've punished him for what he's done.'

'Punish him you will not,' says the Minister in a sorrowful voice. 'That's all bye with now.'

Then he told her what had happened.

There was a sort of twitching came into Martha's cheek, but she shouted: 'I dinna believe ye. It's a lee ye're tellin' me to frighten me and get him' off. I'll punish him.'

The words were no sooner out of her mouth than the door opened. The men had come up with the wagon, and what with the crowd that had gathered outside and the rain and all things, they had thought fit to fetch in what they had brought without delay.

As they came in, staggerin' a wee, for he was a heavy weight and the step was difficult, I stood stricken like. I couldna take my eyes off Martha. In a second of time she had seen all. Her face went like stane, her eyes were like wounds in the strange whiteness of it, and her look was like a woman possessed. She didna stir. No! Even as they went past her into the kitchen, she stood rigid, glowering at the wall as though she struggled with her own breathing. They were trying to get poor Geordie up to the bedroom, but they couldna manage him decently up the ladder. Then suddenly she opened her lips in speech.

'Put him there,' she calls out in a loud voice, pointing to the sofa in the kitchen.

They put him down as she had bid.

'Now leave me by my lane,' she cries out in a voice that would have daunted ye. 'Leave me by my lane.'

God! I was glad to get out of the place I'll warrant. The minister was the last to leave the shop. He stood for a long time looking at her, raised his arm, then dropped it, made as though to speak, but was silent, and at long last came out into the rain.

None that saw that Hogmanay in Levenford forgot it to their dying day. Folks walked in the streets as though they were in the kirk, and spoke in whispers. Ay, when they passed the shop in Church Street they didna dare to speak at all.

We were poor company in the Club on that night. As ye ken, it's aye been the custom for the members to see in the New Year in richt royal fashion, like we're doin' this nicht; but for once that custom lapsed. And 'twas the same in the toun. When the clock ströck twal', beating out the old, beatin' in the new, not a sound was heard. No bells, no horns, no singing at the Cross – just a deathly quiet. And when the last stroke faded awa' we put on our ulsters and went home.

It was wet and dreary and dark now. Ay, it was a thaw richt enough; and as we splashed home through the street ye could hear the drip, drip of water from the eaves, and the rain trickling as it ran down the window-panes like tears.

Four or five of us there were, all goin' the same road, and as we passed the corner of Dobbie's Loan we saw a thin slant of light gashed out into the darkness. It wasna a bricht, warm light that might come from a blithe and tidy house, but 'twas pale and dim, and because we kenned it came from Martha's kitchen 'twas a'most fearsome.

John Grierson was with us, a man that wasna easy fleyed, and something of a scoffer to the bargain. Scandalous if ye like, but nothing would do but he must go to the window and take a keek at what was goin' on inside. And so, muckle against our judgment, we followed him down the Loan, and looked into that uncanny window.

Well, what we saw ye never could believe, but it's gospel

truth for a' that. The room was full of shadows, but by the thin light of the candle we saw Martha Lang walking up and doun like a woman demented. Ay, it was her, though by ordinar' never would I have kenned her. She had a shrunken shilpit look about her as if she had fallen into herself, and her hair had turned to the colour of driven snow. She was wringing her hands like she was wrastlin' with something, and all the time moaning out Geordie's name.

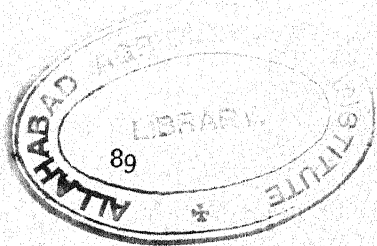
The Book was lying open on the kitchen table and once or twice she made as though to pick it up to read. But she couldna. No, she couldna.

'Geordie! Geordie!' she went on crying out aloud. Then all of a sudden she turned and flung herself down on her knees by the low couch. She put one arm around her dead son's neck, so that his head twisted and fell ower on her own flat breast like a bairn's, and with her other hand she started fondling his cauld stiff face and smoothing back his plastered hair.

The face of the corpse, streakit in that candle's light, looked up at her with a ghastly grin that would have turned ye with horror. And Martha, Black Martha mind ye, began rocking herself back and forrit on her knees, distracted by her grief.

'Geordie! Geordie!' she cries out in a desperate voice, 'I never kenned I loved ye till the now, but I did, my son, I did.' On and on she went.

Not one of us moved hand or foot. Rooted to the ground we stood in fear and sorrow. Through the drip, drip of the rain came that strange and moving sound, which I will never to my dying day forget. Ay, 'twas the fearsome sound of Martha's sobbing.



A Russian Story

BY DAVID GARNETT

THE summer of 1912 was hot and the Ukraine lay black, scorched and dusty; lines of peasants toiled all day in the great fields, but the village street was deserted and even fowls and dogs did not stray, but only moved from the west to the north sides of the log cabins so as to keep in the shade.

At the big house it was too hot to play croquet until after sunset, and the day was spent sitting under an awning on the veranda playing reversi, and drinking tea, or in taking the seeds out of red currants with a pin to make jam. In the middle of the hot afternoon Lidia Nicolaevna and her English girl friend sometimes went down to the river where they bathed naked; nobody ever came to the river at that time of day. The two girls undressed a few yards apart and, stepping out of the crumpled white rings of chemise and skirt, pushed their way through the willow herb to the clayey bank which squeezed up between their toes.

Many plants in flower grew beside the river, and the water, scented with water-lilies and peppermint, was soft upon their skins. As they swam they splashed themselves continually to keep away the horseflies, and for the same reason when the bathe was over, they dried themselves quickly and hurried to put on their clothes; basking in the sun was impossible. Sometimes, instead of going to bathe, they walked out to the forest and spent the day wandering about, gathering toadstools and whortleberries, but there, too, they could not rest; if they sat down for a moment the flies swarmed in clouds round their heads, got into their mouths or climbed up their nostrils, and in Russia even houseflies bite.

Lidia Nicolaevna had made friends with Hester Crosbie at Newnham all the more easily because the English girl was learning Russian, and had invited her to come to stay with her family during the long vacation, for she longed to show Hester the background of her life and to show her Russia; moreover, she loved her too much to be parted from her all the summer. But even in England, when she had asked her, she had remembered how much she had disliked being at home, and had known that they would both be bored. There was no tennis, no parties, no interesting conversation; the neighbours and the young men who occasionally visited the house were grotesque and tedious, and Hester would think that her family was grotesque too.

The girls were bored, but they laughed a good deal, and many tiresome things amused them because they were together. Lidia's aunt Maria Ivanovna was tiresome, yet the two girls could laugh and talk easily with the precise middle-aged lady, who would not respect their privacy, and was constantly coming into their bedrooms to look at their clothes. 'If she seems fond of you it is because she adores your tailor-made,' said Lidia, and for several days Maria Ivanovna could talk of nothing else. 'I want a new dress for the autumn: it shall be a Scotch tweed, just like yours. I will get it made at Tchernopinsk; the only difficulty is to get the material,' a difficulty that was solved by writing to the English firm of Muir and Mirrelees in Moscow. The girls were fingering the slips of Cheviot and Harris, and discussing the values of checks, herring-bone and Lovat mixtures with Maria Ivanovna in July, but it was the middle of August before the parcel came from Moscow, and Lidia, clapping her hands over the tea-table, told her aunt that they would go with her to the town when she went to the dressmaker.

For several days there was a difficulty about the horses, and who knows when they would have got the carriage if Hester had not spoken about it quite innocently to Nicolai Ivanitch himself! Lidia's father was fat and lazy; he ate

a great deal, and, picking his teeth carefully after every meal, went into his study where he drank two more glasses of vodka, spread a handkerchief over his face to keep off flies, and went to sleep. After Hester had spoken in her broken Russian about the carriage he walked out to the estate office and stormed at the overseer, saying that an affront was being put upon a guest, and asking why if there were no horses they ate so much corn. . . .

The carriage was waiting next morning, only, as it turned out, a horse was lame, so there was only the shaft-horse and trace-horse. Maria Ivanovna wore her sateen hobble-skirt to impress the dressmaker: she carried a leather bag ornamented with poker work, swinging on long straps, and a parasol with a long green handle, and she wore a veil. The two girls wore light summer frocks and refused to go back for their mackintoshes. Everyone in the house came to stand on the steps to watch them set off; Nicolai Ivanitch stood on the top step beaming at them and took a cigar out of his mouth to call out: 'Look out for the Tartars! If they see girls like you they'll catch you and sell you to the Turks for their harems,' and Darya, the old nurse, was on the bottom step and darted out to cling to the carriage, asking them to make sure they had the list safe, and the picnic-basket, and the servants and the children waved handkerchiefs and laughed and were ready to shed tears.

Pyotr the coachman whipped the horses into a sudden gallop, and the chaise bounded lightly from side to side of the beaten earth road, over the ruts. The sweet scent of flowering buckwheat in the great fields filled the fresh morning, and as they passed the mere a heron rose close to the vodka distillery and flew slowly across to the river.

After an hour they came to the forest and turned into it, exchanging the scents of flowers for the cries of birds, and the level view of golden rye and wheat for the shadow of tall poplars and birches, amongst the branches of which they could see golden orioles darting, on their dark wings, and fierce little black or tawny hawks perching close to clusters of rooks' nests.

Once the two girls saw a red squirrel run across the path, and once they passed a peasant wearing a torn yellow shirt and bark shoes, who walked along with his hands in his pockets and a little axe balanced on his shoulder.

When they had gone some miles they came to a clearing, and, turning on the box, the coachman told them that he would take them a shorter way, then drawing his horses off the track among the birch-stumps. The sun fell full on them, and out of the shadow of the trees it was oppressively hot, a heat all the greater since the horses had to go at walking pace, picking their way. Occasionally a wheel caught on a stump, and one side of the chaise leaped in the air and fell back again, throwing them all together in a heap; when this happened the coachman swore gently to the horses and Lidia shrieked and clutched Hester. But Maria Ivanovna sat bolt upright in her best clothes; smiling eagerly and expectantly she looked as though she were driving in the Bois de Boulogne and had just caught sight of an acquaintance.

Presently Hester saw that she was looking at a little watch which swung on an enamel brooch on her bust, like a military medal. 'We'll have lunch now, Pyotr.' The coachman pulled up and began unpacking the hamper, while the ladies remained sitting in the open carriage. 'How different from an English picnic!' Hester said to herself as the coachman, having spread a table-cloth on the seat opposite, laid out caviare sandwiches, pasties, smoked ham, and sausages, and then opened a bottle of port and began slicing up a lemon.

'How far does this forest stretch, and to whom does it all belong?' asked Hester, bringing the simple answer: 'It is ours until we come to the river.'

'Who looks after it?'

'Why, our foresters – and I am sorry that we have come this short way or we might have seen one of them; he is handsome for a peasant, but they say that he's dying.'

But Hester was more interested in whether there were elks in the forest than in hearing about the illness of the forester,

and as they gnawed at the half-circles of lemon the talk was of wolves coming into the villages in winter, to eat the watch-dogs in their kennels, with terrible stories of cold and starvation which Hester found hard to credit amid the wealth of summer.

The crumbs were brushed away, the last drops of port swallowed down, and they continued on their way in heat which became more intolerably oppressive every moment. When they had passed from last year's clearing into one of the winter before, the horses could only walk slowly, with the undergrowth and even young saplings whipping their bellies and bending down under the oncoming chaise, impeding its progress like weeds holding back a boat.

When the women looked back, they saw the grey undersides of the little triangular birch-leaves, and the red stems slowly straightening in their wake.

The short cut did not seem so short as they meandered from side to side avoiding the taller growth, but at last the clearing closed in, and the shadow, under a wall of forest which rose up like a green cliff, engulfed them. The trunks of the trees were set close together, and their way was difficult until they had breasted a bank of earth and plunged down into the ditch below, and then found themselves again upon the track. Even in the shadow of the trees the air was stifflingly hot; Maria Ivanovna seemed to feel it at last, for she drew a large flagon of eau-de-Cologne from her bag, lifted her veil and sprinkled her face. The two girls followed her example, and revived by the cool sting of the spirit began once more to laugh and chatter. Soon the forest came to an end, and when they had forded the river, the coachman whipped the horses into a gallop, and half an hour later they reached the town.

In Tchernopinsk there is an enormous new cathedral of glazed white brick, with the usual green roofs and golden cupola, which stands not quite in the middle of a huge square of dried mud, full of filth and rubbish. At the far side of the square from the cathedral stands the Governor's

residence, with two striped sentry boxes in front of the gates. 'Why are there no sentries?' asked Hester — a question which led Maria Ivanovna to reply that the Governor was a peaceful man who disliked fuss, and that, moreover, he always spent the summer on the Riviera. The post office and the police-station are half a mile outside the town, close to the railway, so that in Tchernopinsk itself there are no architectural features except the sentry-boxes and the cathedral; there are scarcely any houses of more than one story, yet Lidia was telling her friend that there were twelve thousand inhabitants, of whom ten thousand were Jews who lived by selling Manchester goods and hardware. The coachman drew up in the shadow of the cathedral, and climbing out of the carriage the ladies separated: Maria Ivanovna going straight to her dressmaker, and the two girls preparing to stroll round the town. For a few moments they watched the older woman as she trotted briskly off with tiny steps across the great expanse of beaten earth, avoiding the heaps of garbage, swinging her bag and holding her silk sunshade bravely over her head. Then they turned to each other laughing and, linking their arms, walked off, pursued by a crowd of begging children, each of whom was blessed with some deformity, so that it seemed to Hester that a whole Jewish children's hospital had been let loose on them. At last the little boy with the hare-lip, the little girl with her nose eaten away, and the baby with only three fingers, were discouraged by Lidia's hard words, and the two girls were free to wander round the square, and to glance down one or two of the side streets.

Soon they were tired and took refuge in a confectioner's shop, where they bought a pound of little kringles as fly-blown and as yellow with varnish as the only picture on the wall, which represented Robinson Crusoe aiming at a bear in a tree, while Man Friday danced at the end of the snow-laden branch of a spruce-fir. This picture Hester would have wished to buy had she not been held back by a scruple of conscience, for it seemed to her wicked to take away the

only beautiful or interesting thing in the whole town. When their interest in the picture was exhausted, they went back to sit in the carriage and munch kringles, amusing themselves by looking at the Jews passing and repassing, shuffling, waddling, and slinking, gesticulating with dirty fingers, and swinging their arms from side to side.

Half an hour later Maria Ivanovna appeared and began triumphantly telling them what the tailor had said when he had undone the parcel and handled the cloth, how he had measured her and cut out, while she was waiting, a pattern of the dress in hessian, had basted it together and tried it on. As she talked she crunched up one kringle after another, and as Pyotr had already collected her parcels, he whipped up the horses and they set off. Although it was by then four o'clock in the afternoon, the heat was fiercer than it had been in the morning. 'The air was heavy and painful to breathe; not a puff of wind rippled over the fields, and the corn stood motionless in a horrid dream. Maria Ivanovna had soon used up the last of her eau-de-Cologne, and the three women sat streaming with sweat, too exhausted to speak, and hardly able to keep their seats in the jolting carriage. It seemed to Hester a long way to the river and the ford, but before they reached it suddenly the carriage stopped abruptly and the coachman pointed to a dog which was running about aimlessly in the road before them: a liver-and-white pointer, so emaciated that the bones stood out and the skin drooped in folds between its ribs. The beast held its head low down on one side and often shook it; from its movements Hester could see that it was distracted with pain. Once the circle in which it ran brought it close to the carriage, and at that moment Hester suddenly saw that Maria Ivanovna had closed her parasol and, gripping it like a sword, was preparing for defence lest the creature attack them. But the dog passed by harmlessly, and still shaking its head set off along the road to the town. 'A mad dog,' said Lidia; then she added: 'And I've got such an awful headache myself.' Maria Ivanovna opened her sun-

shade, the coachman whipped up the horses, and a few minutes later they had crossed the river and entered the forest.

There were no longer any birds to be seen, no squirrels ran across the path, they did not see a peasant with an axe, and all the eager pleasure they had felt in the morning was forgotten. The chaise bumped them up and down, and the motion which in the morning had seemed like a boat riding lightly among waves, was like a box falling downstairs; they felt their very bones bruised by the shaking, and the springs of the carriage seemed to have collapsed.

Suddenly in the distance there was the faint muttering of thunder, soon they saw flashes, and a few drops of rain fell. Pyotr turned round on the box and suggested that they should take shelter at the forester's hut, and Maria Ivanovna nodded vigorously and began to urge him to drive faster. He began lashing the horses with his whip, and they set off at a gallop down the narrow tunnel between the trees. Already it had become almost dark, the sun-spangled forest of the morning seemed to them black and full of evil, and the darkness was all the greater because of the blinding flashes of lightning which lit up every leaf and twig, and when the thunder came they could feel the horses leap forward in sudden bounds of terror. Pyotr shouted at them, cracking his whip and lashing the trace-horse; flecks of foam from the brutes' mouths fell on the girls' muslin sleeves. The chaise rocked so much that they had to hold on to avoid being thrown out, and sometimes it seemed to them that it was going to swing round altogether and be smashed against the trunk of a tree. Lidia held her forehead in one hand and said dully: 'My head aches,' and Maria Ivanovna suddenly screamed something in Hester's ear, but the thunder was too loud and too continuous for the English girl to catch a word. The old lady sat bolt upright, gripping an iron rail beside the cushion with her right hand. Suddenly the trees fell away, and they entered a clearing, one or two buildings were revealed in a flash of lightning, and they saw that Pyotr was tugging at the reins

with all his might, trying to pull up the horses, which were besides themselves with terror.

Bump, bump went the chaise as he pulled the horses off the track and the wheels struck against the stumps of trees, and it was not until he had taken the horses in a great circle all round the clearing and they had twice nearly overturned, that he was able to pull up by the very threshold of the forester's hut. Without saying a word, the three women jumped out of the chaise and ran in at the open doorway, and in the next moment the rain came down like a sheet of steel, blotting out the chaise and Pyotr and the horses. 'Have we got all the parcels?' exclaimed Maria Ivanovna, ignoring the tall figure of the forester, who stood bowing in the inner doorway and begging them to come in and be seated. Hester looked at him eagerly and though she remembered Lydia saying that he was handsome, she was amazed that she had been told so little; for to her his beauty was absolutely overwhelming: he seemed the most beautiful, perhaps the only beautiful man she had ever seen. Tall and lean, but with the broad shoulders of the peasant, he was a young man, between twenty and thirty years old, with thick tawny fair hair parted in the middle and cut off horizontally like a straw thatch, so as just to show the lobes of his ears. The beard was darker and more curly than the hair, and the eyebrows were marked; below them, large deep-blue eyes looked at her modestly and gravely; his face was very pale.

The three women went into the living-room and sat down while the forester, with slow, unhurried courtesy, fetched food from the cupboard and offered them curds in lacquered bowls with wooden spoons, then, blowing up the fire, he put some water on it to boil eggs. Before the water boiled Pyotr called out: he was having difficulty with the horses: the thunder and lightning were growing worse, and the horses plunged about terrified. The forester threw a sheepskin over his shoulders and went outside. Maria Ivanovna, who had scarcely looked once in his direction,

and hardly seemed to be aware of her surroundings, began greedily eating from the bowl of curd. 'That's good,' she said, licking her lips. 'Only the peasants have no sugar.' Hester, on the other hand, looked about her all the time, and all the details of the room remained stamped in her mind: the gun with a polished walnut stock and gleaming barrels, and trigger-guard which shone like silver, leaning against the wall, under a gilt icon with a little flame before it, the earthenware cooking-pots arranged neatly in a row on the shelf. Everything in the room was neat and scrupulously clean; everywhere there was clean wood well washed and polished, the log walls which had been smoothed with an axe, the floor which was made of whole pine-trees, split in two, the oak table, the ash stools on which they were sitting. On one of the walls two wolf-skins had been pegged up, and from a beam over the stove a ham and several bunches of herbs and onions were hanging. The smell of the room was clean and strong, made up of the scent of rich hay, of polished wood, of Russian leather, and of something pungent like gunpowder.

For a few moments the rumble of the thunder died away, and through the hiss of rain they could hear the forester talking quietly to one of the horses. When Pyotr came back they could hear him unharnessing it, then he led it away, and the forester came back into the room. He had run out bareheaded, and his thick locks were soaked and dark with water, which ran trickling down his shaven neck and fell in drops from his beard. When he came into the room a beautiful setter-bitch, which Hester had not seen before, came out from under the table, and, watching the beast's gesture of adoration, the girl felt envy mingled with her sympathy. Thus she would willingly greet her own lord coming in from the storm outside.

The forester took a towel from a cupboard, dried his face and neck, and wiped his hands; then he turned over an hour-glass of sand and put six eggs into the saucepan of boiling water. Soon the table was set with bread and salt,

and the eggs put before them in wooden egg-cups. 'Would it please you to have mushrooms, my lady?' he asked, and Maria Ivanovna was moved to clap her hands and say, 'Do you hear, Lidia? There are wood mushrooms!'

The man's hands were big, and, as he turned over the toadstools in his basket, picking out first the honey-coloured yellow ones and then the mauve, Hester watched his strong fingers, and all this cookery and hospitality of his delighted her, and she was shocked by the complete indifference of her companions. The mushrooms were set stewing in milk, before Hester noticed that there was a strange unaccountable expression in the forester's face: a look of terror which she surprised there, terror which changed almost at once into hope. The man seemed to have become excited, but she could not guess the reason of that look and of that excitement.

The wood mushrooms were delicious, and Maria Ivanovna mopped up the last of their gravy with crumbs of rye bread. 'Delicious,' she said, smacking her lips. 'Delicious. Now tell me about your health. They say you'll die, don't they?'

The terror and the trembling eagerness came back into the man's face, as he begged her to read a paper the doctor had given him. While he was looking for it he began telling them how he had suffered from fainting-fits which lasted for hours, and how he had gone to the town to see the doctor, who had sounded him with a stethoscope. 'He put it here and there all over my chest and back, and listened, and then he wrote out this paper and sent me to the dispensary with it. They are Jews there, but they gave me some powders. "You may drop dead any day, my boy," said the Jew. "Your heart's worn out."'

Maria Ivanovna licked her lips with a little pink tongue while she was reading aloud, and Hester watched the man's strong fingers nervously picking at something, and for some reason this picking of his fingers frightened her.

'"Dmitri Semyonitch Chaagayev, Forester.

'"Complains of prolonged fainting-fits.

'"Diagnosis: Progressive valvular disease of the heart.

His general health is remarkably good. Any over-strain or hard manual labour is likely to prove fatal.

“Treatment: Digitalis: a powder every five days.”

“Well, you see, my friend, there’s no hope there,” said Maria Ivanovna, complacently. “Do you understand what’s written here?”

“No, madam, please explain to me. Does he think there’s a chance yet?”

“Indeed he doesn’t. He says any hard work you do is likely to kill you. But you have to work, don’t you? God will take you one day when you are cutting a tree, or hauling logs.”

The forester nodded; his eyes were terror-stricken, and there was sweat gathering on his pale face.

“But even if you didn’t work you would die quite soon. Because you see he says here the disease is progressive. Do you know what that means?”

“No, madam, I can only read Slavonic, and the Scriptures, and the educated words I don’t know.”

He was picking with his fingers desperately at something.

“Progressive means that it gets worse and worse of itself. So whatever you do you can’t stop it. There are little flaps in the heart like the leathers in a pump, and this disease is eating away one of the flaps. When it’s perished right through you’ll die, and that may happen any day now.”

The forester took a handkerchief out of his breeches pocket and wiped his face. His hand was shaking, and it was some time before he could trust himself to speak. At last, however, he moistened his lips and said very quietly:

“Then what are the powders for?”

Maria Ivanovna shrugged her shoulders.

“Doctors like to give medicines. It may save you for a few weeks, but it can’t cure you.”

“It does upset the stomach,” said the forester. “The Jew in the dispensary said I wasn’t to mind that, but that if I saw everything coloured blue I was to give up taking them for three weeks. What was the reason of his saying that, madam?”

'And do you see things blue?' asked Maria Ivanovna, laughing.

'No, madam, I don't as yet.'

'Well, perhaps you will before you die, if you take too many of these powders and they poison you. If you take too many powders they will kill you, and if you stop taking them it seems you'll die of heart disease.'

There was a silence for some time. At last the forester said hardly above a whisper:

'Old Sasha Kusmitch used to have fainting-fits and pains in his heart, like mine; the wise woman at Bielechuk cured him; so I went to her and she bid me take foxglove leaves. Maybe I had better try them.'

Lidia, who had been silent for some time, suddenly lifted her head, saying:

'That's what the doctor has given you. Digitalis means foxglove. Those powders are powdered foxglove. You mustn't take any more of it or it will be too much.'

'So there's no hope from the wise woman, it seems,' said the forester.

'Gracious me, I should think not,' said Maria Ivanovna. 'If the doctor says you'll die you will die. It's no good asking an ignorant old woman.'

'It seems she has given him the same powders, anyway,' said Lidia.

The man began shivering all over, and feeling ashamed of himself got up and dropping the wooden dipper into a birch-bark bucket of water he drank a little.

'Death may come any minute, then?' he asked.

'Yes, any minute. It's incurable, and it gets worse every day. Do you understand now?'

Maria Ivanovna began folding up the letter and looked out of the little carved window.

'The rain has almost stopped,' she said. 'Pyotr! put the horses in.'

'Directly, directly,' came the coachman's voice, who had been listening to their conversation from the outer shed.

'What am I to tell my brother?' she asked, turning to the forester. 'Have you any message to send him? How are things going in the forest?'

The forester smiled suddenly, showing two rows of even white teeth. 'Ah, tell him, please, that I greet him and his relations most respectfully, and that everything goes on capitally. Tell him there's plenty of game. Tell him, please, that the townsmen have been coming to steal the timber where it hasn't been cleared away, but I have beaten them off so far. They bring guns now and have taken to shooting at me whenever they see me.' He laughed, a warm hearty laugh. 'It's a good job my gun's a breech-loader and that they are bad shots. The last time they came there were a dozen of them all armed with guns and revolvers, but I caught them at the ford, and they had to swim for it and leave their horses. But I sent word about that before when I sent the horses along.'

The coachman put his head in at the doorway. 'We're all ready, madam.'

The three women got up and went out, followed by the forester, who was still talking eagerly.

'The peasants will start felling trees here and there, when the leaves have fallen, but I catch them now and then, and they know it's a risky game. But these town chaps are the mischief. It's like fighting the Japanese.' He laughed, and Hester turned to look at him as they drove off as he stood outside his hut, bowing low, with the setter-bitch beside him.

The coachman drove slowly: there were great pools of water lying along the track which flew up in spray from the wheels.

'That rest has done me a lot of good,' said Maria Ivanovna, tucking a rug around her. 'It was just what I wanted. Now if the road wasn't so bumpy I think I could take a nap.' She looked happily about her with the sleepy expression of someone who has just dined very well indeed.

'I wonder if he'll really see everything coloured blue before he dies,' she said with a chuckle. 'I should like to know that.'

The Window of Broken Magic

BY LOUIS GOLDING

It is a strange tale I have to tell of an old man, a Jew, by name Jean Pinchas, and a dead boy who has been dead for five hundred years. I must ask your indulgence for it. If you find it preposterous, which I dare to hope you will not, you will rather blame the old man, Jean Pinchas, than myself. Yet I am certain if I succeed in presenting him to you, if you will not withhold your censure, you will also not withhold your affection and your pity.

I confess that to me the prime importance of this tale – the only importance, if you like – is the curious reversal in it of a lamentable fantasy – the fantasy by which certain tragic fools hold that the life of a child is taken for some dark esoteric purpose, a fantasy hardly to be spoken of. I do not wish to allow my imagination, or yours, to dwell upon the mode in which sporadically, but during so many centuries, the Jews have been the victim of this chimera. Nor, in presenting the tale of Jean Pinchas, and his '*Petit Rabbin*,' as he called him, the boy who died five hundred years ago, will I linger among the crucibles and retorts, the mortar and pestles, of that ancient sorcerer and fine craftsman, Pierre d'Orange. We will not linger overlong about the spectacle of a lad dying upon a trestle-bed, full in the rays of the setting sun, and Pierre d'Orange busy with spell and incantation, the refining of mineral and animal dyes, bubbling cauldrons, the green eyes of his cats.

The tale opens in the tiny village of La Charité, in that region of Provence which Jewish writers in the Middle Ages called 'Arba' Kehillot.' The capital town of this region was

the illustrious Papal city of Avignon. With the three further Jewish communities of Carpentras, Cavaillon and L'Isle, the 'Arba' Kehillot' formed such a curious rich island in an encompassing gentile sea as Salonica, for instance, in later centuries. But these communities had a significance and a culture more memorable than the Levantine. It would be irrelevant to digress further into that fascinating by-path of Jewish history. I must only recall to memory the fact that from the earliest Christian ages these Jews had been established here, that in the time of the Papal Captivity in Avignon they became a noble race, famous for skill and learning, that in all the later centuries which extend to the time of the French Revolution these Jews dwindled, till nothing more than a name and a few stones were left of all their glory.

Now upon the outskirts of this region is the village of La Charité. And I find the name curiously appropriate from more than one point of view. For whereas this countryside is mainly a stony and a barren place, somewhat harsh, somewhat austere, and very few other trees grow there than the sparse olive, and when the anemones and the wild jonquils of spring have gone, but few flowers follow – La Charité is hidden away in a green pocket among the grey hills. Not here does the broad turbulent Rhône flow, the Rhône to which of old time the Jews of Avignon consigned their sins – but this is a countryside of sleeping pools. Beyond the willows that rim the pools, elm-woods stretch towards that opening in the hills beyond which once more Provence resumes her arid tale. If a stranger chances here, he forgets to go further on his wandering. Enough of music for him will be the lapse and murmur of breezes, the unceasing cry of doves; and the children tumbling about among the fat geese; and the sleepy builders who are building the new church against the Mairie, and spend more time on the benches in the *brasserie* than on the planks of their scaffolding. And the amiable priest, Père Amyas.

And that strange sweet man, old Jean Pinchas, the last Jew of that ancient communion of 'Arba' Kehillot.' And I do

not know whether I should most dwell upon his sweetness or his strangeness. No, the traveller will not overlook old Jean, nor be unkind to him. The old priest is not. The children are not. And he is a Jew. There are no more Jews in all that region.

When I first saw Jean Pinchas he was wreathing chains of wild flowers round the dark Sinaitic boulder which stands in Fayard's meadow. His back was turned from me, but the breeze swung his long beard sideward and the sun refined it into a cadence of fine gold.

Now why did I say of that boulder that it was Sinaitic, a rock pregnant with secrecy and awe like the rocks which stand up upon the river slopes of Sinai? And why should I so promptly have concluded of old Pinchas that he was a Jew, almost before he turned his face towards me? I confess that my imagination had been possessed by the curious tale of the Jews in this land, how they had prospered and had fallen upon evil days, and now there was little left of them but a name and a few shadows. The old man garlanding the dark rock seemed hardly more substantial than a shadow. But he must have had substance once. And the substance belonged to an epoch before the Middle Ages initiated their glory and their shame, before his ancestors had begun their second wandering, before even they had attained the land out of which they wandered. He was a Jew amongst those earliest Jews who came wandering out of the southward desert and fell upon sudden water and wild flowers that seemed more incredible than moon or stars; and there among the pools out of which high Jordan rises, he took to weaving chains of wild flowers about the forehead of the dark rock in the meadow.

What? You find my geography more turbid than my history even? You swear that the footslopes of Mount Sinai do not send forth those rivulets out of which the pools are fashioned whence high Jordan rises?

Forgive me, Provence is an enchanted land, and La Charité a nucleus of magic at the heart of that enchantment.

I knew only and at once that Jean Pinchas was a Jew, and the last of that race of Jews. And when he turned to me, and I had given him Jewish greeting, he smiled and said softly: 'Ah, you wonder what this may be? This is the footstool of my Master. You have heard tell of him?'

But I had not. I urged him to tell me more. 'The Master?' he said in astonishment. '*Le petit Rabbin*?' He would have continued, but a gang of children scampered over to him and seized his hands and made him play ring-of-roses with them. I whistled into the broad noonday. Was this man mad, or I? Curiously I would rather so have maligned myself than him. Children do not trust themselves to madmen. No man in all France was saner than Jean Pinchas, where he crawled and romped with two babies dangling from his beard and others stuck all over him like barnacles of mirth.

It was not easy, however, to get the tale out of the mouths of the villagers or the old priest, though they cared dearly for their 'old Jew,' and he sat against their thresholds for long hours till the time came for his evening prayers, and he went off to his small hovel and faced the East and shook his shoulders and tugged his beard like any ancient Jew from the Pale of Russia. And though it seemed simple enough to ask him what he meant by his mysterious words, and who his *petit Rabbin* was – he was not only a gentle old man, but somewhat fearful, and in odd moments forbidding even. And less than ever before could I bring myself to bid him expound his secret until, wandering with me late one Sabbath night, he pointed to the stars which powder the heavens in the region of Vega, and speaking of one out of all that multitude, proclaimed suddenly: 'Ah, then – do you behold him? The Master? The Little Rabbi? The Little Jew of God?'

'Where?' I whispered. 'Where?'

He turned from me impatiently. 'Ah! You are blind!' he said. 'No eyes! No eyes!'

La Charité was not a lucid place, and though the pools there are full of clear water, they are so deep that you cannot

see their beds. It was not lucid, I mean, in the sense that mystery hovered in the air and suspended from the willow-branches. And the very shrine of the mystery was an old disregarded church hidden away behind a mill. I could not help wondering for my own part why this lovely church of the early Gothic time should be so disregarded. It seemed peculiarly unaccountable why the people of La Charité should involve themselves in the expense of building a new church while so gracious a building was falling into decay. And neither the priest nor the villagers made any bones about going over to a church at a distance of several kilometres for the morning Mass, whereas if they had put their shoulders to the wheel, the old Église du Sacré Cœur, as the Gothic semi-ruin was called, might have been fit for service in a month or two.

The priest was *désoccupé*, as it were, except for his local administrations. The peasants lost any amount of time. Yet the repair of the Sacré Cœur seemed to be a matter which did not enter into consideration.

Why? Why was this? It was true that the roof was beginning to let in water. But that could have been repaired quickly enough. The windows were sound, or all but one. This was a window of such stained-glass as I have seen nowhere among my wanderings, whether in Chartres or in Ulm, in York or in Regensburg. I do not add as a mere afterthought the fact that this window was not sound. It was something other than a window. That I felt at once, not merely because a great hole gaped across its evil magnificence, so wantonly that I realized that it had been broken of set purpose, but because the window itself seemed to consist of something other than glass, and its dyes to be something more precious and desperate than any cunning mixture of pounded minerals.

I stood one day in the bare aisle, flanked by its soaring arches. I gazed on the window with a sort of terror. Even now, gashed and gaping, it exerted a hypnotic spell. I endeavoured to present to myself the spectacle of that window

in its completeness and glory, as it was five hundred years ago, as it might have been ten years ago. I felt at once a constriction at my throat, an evil odour in my nostrils.

I knew then. I knew. I knew that the stained-glass window was at the heart of the secret of La Charité. I knew that that place had not been a house of God, when that window hemmed in its western perspective. It was a thing of witchcraft. Not now. Oh, not now. The great blue winds surged in. You saw through the hole the intersection of swallows' wings.

And how then was the old Jew, Jean Pinchas, the last Jew in that country – how was he bound up with the mystery of a Christian church and a remote French village in a hollow among the hills?

I did not ask him bluntly now. It was with an almost conscious cunning, as I was aware, that he skirted all reference to his Master, his little Rabbi. Nor could I bring myself to ask the priest or the villagers what the meaning was, of a window broken, a church abandoned, and an old Jew that wreathed the forehead of a rock with flowers.

I went carefully to work. I told Jean Pinchas tales of all the Jews in the world's strange places – of those that feast upon lotus still in Homer's Island of the Lotophagi; those yellow Jews with pigtailed on the Mongolian plateaux; of the stout Jews with cigars on Fifth Avenue; the black Jews with tomtoms in the swamps of Abyssinia. And we discussed not these people only, but their ritual and legends; I learned by slow comparison how the traditional service of these Jews of the 'Arba' Kehillot' differed from all others, excepting that it had great affinities with the Portuguese. I learned of those hymns and poems which they recited once and he alone recites now. We became good friends, that sweet old Jew and I.

Why should I further delay the tale he told me, that night thicker with stars than any lawn with daisies? It was a night when lovely airs were abroad and strings twanged upon invisible instruments. And when once a chord plucked louder

than before, he threw his head back suddenly, and lifted his hand towards a star in the region of Vega, and cried aloud: 'O Master, O little Rabbi - I shall not delay long!'

And this was the tale he told me in that countryside of sleeping pools, where magic suspends from the willow-branches.

'It had been known, my friend, for many centuries,' said he. 'It had been no secret. That was why the place was haunted by the crying of a boy in the night, and in the morning by the crying of a boy.'

'Who was he? From what land do you come that you have not heard his fame? Not more than fifteen years old he was - his confirmation, his *bar-mitzvah*, achieved two years ago. Wiser he was than the greybeards of Livorno or the rabbis of Hamburg. There was not one of the books which was not as open to him as the sky to the noonday sun. Not only the academies of France, but even the ancient academies of Egypt or Babylon, had never known a youth holier than he. He had a skin pale as parchment, and hair black as the jet upon the feet of a raven. But his blood was red with sanctity, urgent with God.'

'Now in those days a great artificer lived, and his workshop was in these parts, in the city of Orange. No man was more cunning in the twisting of iron, the carving of stone, the mixing of dyes for stained-glass. And it seems certain that this man, Pierre d'Orange his name was, had reached the farther boundary of all that may be achieved by natural processes in the domain of beauty. No craftsman in all France was his equal for the illumination of missals, or even the stitching of embroidery upon sacred garments. He was a poor man. So much I must say for him. He gave away what money was given to him to scoundrels or poor men, without distinguishing them. He had not the lust for money, but the more terrible lust for beauty. And he had attained all of beauty that was to be achieved in the sweet simple processes of nature.'

'Whereon he betook himself to the dark Sabbatic books, the incantations of the inverse Kabbala, the ritual of Moloch

and Beelzebub and of the primal Dionysius, the Dionysius not of Hellas but of Thrace. And the request came to him that he should furnish for this church of La Charité its eastern window. As I have said, he was not a man who loved God. He loved beauty only. And that is why God has never been truly worshipped in that place, for woe of a boy crying in the morning, and a boy crying in the night.

'Obscure and desperate were the recipes which that perverted man learned out of his books, for the fashioning of beauty.

'And the knowledge came to him – Hold my arm! I am faint! Let me be silent a moment!

'Ah, my heart beats again! So! Let us walk farther!

'And the knowledge came to him how the most beautiful window in all the stained-glass of the world might be fashioned. And in no other wise than this. How a Jewish lad in the moment of his dying shall be held down in a magic circle by the utterance of the due words; what elements shall be compounded; what herbs gathered under what stars; what resolutions and disintegrations of matter; what persistence of spell and formula.

'So that, when the boy yields up his soul at length, he shall not yield it up to God. It shall be incorporated in the seething brew, among these gross humours of earth. It shall be fixed, perpetually frozen. It shall give the scarlet among the artificers' dyes the glory of a holy lad's blood, and the high tints the splendour of his eyes.

'And in the measure that the Jewish lad is a lad of God, opposed therefore to Moloch and sworn foe to Dionysius, in so much the more shall the magnificence be more than the magnificence of comfortable earth or the bright sky.

'Even so, my friend, it came to pass. Even so. And for five centuries the little Master was arrested there, who should so long ago have put on white raiment among the companies of God. And no man in these parts did not know it. For at night there was the sound of a lonely boy crying for his own sanctities, and in the morning a lonely boy crying.

'And no Christian durst liberate him, for shall it not be sacrilege for him to do violence to his temple? And no Jew might, for none but a certain one has so dared in all these centuries.

'And no man was happy then in this place. And no man in this place is not happy now.

'And I it was upon a certain midnight came in and cast the stone with all my might, that the boy of the Jews might be free. I it was.

'For a voice said to me: "Break the spell of that bad glamour! Thou, the last of the Jews in this region, the last of his kinsmen! Break it, break it, or thou shalt be broken!"

'So I flung the stone into the teeth of the enchantment, straight and terrible at the heart of that corrupt window.

'And there was such a sweep of keen winds, and so splendid a music from beyond the star when the little Rabbi came from his prison, that for days I lay as one dead. But the Master stood over me, keeping my faint heart beating surely against my return to the earthly day.

'Behold him, O kinsman! Where his hair shines athwart the blue central star of the summer heavens!

'I shall not delay long, O little Jew of God!

'Leave me, kinsman, leave me now! I am very tired. . . .'

★

The sleeping pools slept trancedly under the willows of La Charité.

Penny Whistle

BY OLIVER GOSSMAN

I REMEMBER that New Year (said the Widow Kidd) because we had snow. That's rare with us. We don't go in much for diversions hereabouts.

And those houses opposite weren't there then. That was a field, the ten-acre field that lay all aslant uphill to the skyline. To the right you could just see the tops of the trees around Craig's farm.

Everything was white that afternoon. A good three o'clock it must have been, for I had my early tea on the hob. And it was going to be whiter, so to speak, for the sky was heavy and it was trying to snow again: that powdery snow. My windows were banked up white like my pillows here are now. And there were bits of snow, as big as your fist, on every one of the knobs along the top of my railing out there.

Being as deaf as you like when I want my own peace and my kettle's singing at a good fire, I wouldn't have heard that old man at all if I hadn't thrown up the side window to break up a bit of bread I didn't just need for any scary birds that might see it.

And there he was, the only human in sight. If human he is, thinks I.

But human enough he was in all conscience. Just a beggar man and a very old one at that. He had a beard, and a muffler, and a long coat, and a measly old hat, and he was standing there all on his lonesome, playing a penny whistle with his aged fingers.

Now I'm not fond of music myself much. And if there's one thing I can't abide it's Christmas tunes out of season and

played just for money. And he wasn't even playing a Christmas tune. It was 'Scots wha hae,' if I'm a judge.

What's he doing that for? thinks I.

Those houses opposite weren't there then; there weren't any windows for folk to throw pennies to him from, wrapped up in paper.

Then and there thinks I in my heart: 'You old vagabond!' For no sooner did he see that open window than he put down his tin whistle and began to wrestle with my gate, shoving it back against the snow.

So it's me he's making for! thinks I.

There he stood, right in the middle of my front plot. A beggar man and an old one: though you never can be sure. But you have a right to shut your door on an unknown stranger: you can't shut a wee bit window on anybody. At least not in the daytime, to my mind. And what with the frost and the snow and the cold, and what with his playing the whistle, it looked like the spittle was freezing on his beard.

So I said: 'I'm going to give you a sixpence,' says I; 'it's not for a widow woman to grudge cheer to an old man. And you'll be all the better,' I says, 'for a dish of tea.'

He was a very old beggar man. But he couldn't see, not from where he was, the man's hat and coat and walking-stick I've always kept prominent in the lobbystand all these years I've been a widow. So for safety's sake I says: 'You might have come inside for it if only my man were come home from his work.'

He was too old a man to notice that mistake of mine about a widow woman having a man expected home from his work.

'The Lord reward ye, ma'am,' he says. 'I'm sure I'm much obliged to you.'

He was wearing knitted mittens, and it seemed to do him good to hold the hot cup of tea in his meagre hands while he blew on the tea itself. Then I had a notion of my own, and with his second cup I asks him if he would like a drop of rum in it.

'I'm not a man of dissipation, ma'am,' he says, 'but you offer me a cinder in me tea, and I thank you kindly for it.'

That spirit lit up his aged cheeks, I do declare. 'It goes round inside me,' he says, 'like wedding-bells.'

'Here now,' I said, leaning out, and I got my sleeve all touched up with snow, 'you just stuff this bread and bacon, cold though it is, into that pocket.'

'Not that one, ma'am,' he says, 'that one's got no bottom to it. This other's my pocket for things. And there's one soul will pray for you to-night, lady; if that's not presuming.'

Now I declare, there he was at the gate and he was so very old a man he wouldn't have remembered it if I hadn't remembered it suddenly myself, that all the time I'd forgotten to give him it.

'Your sixpence!' I cries. 'Are you daft?'

And what do you think (Mrs. Kidd asked) my old Father Christmas does after that? He stops dead in the middle of the roadway, with the snow falling on his shoulders, and begins to set up his 'Scots wha hae' again!

So I shouts:

'Not another note for me, old man! You get on your ways while there's light to see by.'

And down goes my window to keep the cold out.

But what way do you think that old man takes? Along our road? Not him.

No; he went through a break in the fence and into the ten-acre field that was lying out there all white up to the skyline.

Now bother, thinks I, what is the old zany going that way for? And if so, why doesn't he go round by the farm road?

True for you, says I to myself, the snow on the field is not yet all but ankle deep; whereas with the north wind that brought the fall in the morning and last night, the ditches of that road must be solid drifts that might bury that old man once and for all.

But why that way at all? I keeps wondering. And I keeps watching him. The snowfall wasn't so thick and I could still

see him when he had got more than half-way up. Yet the snow was thick enough, and, thinks I, before he gets to the top his first footprints will be all white again. Then 'True for you again, sirs,' says I; 'if it's not Craig's farm he's going to, or perhaps the ploughman's cottage beyond that.'

For it's farms and farmers that sometimes still have room for a very old man like that when all your rows of semi-detached villas, in the nature of things, can't accommodate him.

Widows are a special case (added Mrs. Kidd).

Anyway, he didn't go to the farm. The last glimpse I had of him he was going up to the left to where the hill road branches off, if he could find it. Then it struck me what he might be up to.

Susan, thinks I, that old man knows as well as you that apart from the wintry weather that's the shortest cut - by the refuse destructor that used to be a copper mine, through the pine copse and past the cemetery - to the old turnpike road where Smithston is. For Smithston is our poor's-house; for the matter of that it's our asylum as well. I had my second notion that day.

'Lord!' says I, 'that very old man he's making for the poor's-house.' And with that I let down my blind on him.

Next morning was as bright a one as you could wish to begin a year with (said the Widow Kidd). I had my window open again to see what the birds had made of my crumbs, and lo and behold there were none of them left, and two blackbirds perched on the knobs of my railings, having knocked off the knobs of snow. With the sun just over the hill, Craig's ten-acre field was that dazzling it made me blink.

And the first thing I noticed was that there wasn't a single sign of a human footprint on it, not from this end to the other. You never laid a new tablecloth that was more spotless in all your life. 'Ring out the old!' says I.

The second thing I noticed was one of Craig's carts with Craig's man Jimmie on it, just showing up. The sky wasn't

blue, it was a kind of gold, and the cart up there seemed to be coming out of that blazing sky like the chariots of old full of angels.

Jimmie my man, thinks I, that's no road for a horse and cart this day. Though if he could find his way up it every Saturday night in the year, as he did, he might well be able to find his way down it of a New Year's morning, snow or no snow.

He had Craig's boy with him, too, and what's more, Craig's dog. And do you think these two were on the cart or even on the road? Not them. They came running down in advance of the horse and cart, if you please, right down the middle of that white field; and up to all the pranks you can think of with that snow. The dog kept tossing it up with his muzzle and the boy kept kicking it up with his feet. And the boy kept throwing snowballs at the dog, which wasn't fair of him, for the poor beast to be sure, couldn't throw any back at him. And soon enough there were the boy's footprints, and even the dog's four to his two, all over the place where the old man had walked alone in the fear of the Lord.

You're a pair, you are, thinks I; as shameless a boy and as shameless a dog as ever broke into a Sabbath peace like this when their betters have gone their ways and left no traces of themselves.

It was just then when they were within a shout of me, and when the lad was gathering up the snow again, that I saw Craig's boy stand stock-still looking at something in his hands. That dog, believe me, was prancing around him and barking like mad, as dogs do when they think you're going to throw a stone or a stick for them. How my wits were working that day beats me still; but I had my third notion in twenty-four hours. I put my head out of the window and I called out at the top of my angry voice: 'That whistle doesn't belong to you, you young ruffian!'

And the whistle it was, as sure as they christened me Susan. He was a very old man and he must for once have

popped it into that wrong pocket that he said had no bottom to it. Now there was that chit of a boy, paying no heed to me, blowing the snow out of its stops until all of a sudden the whistle began to pipe up of its own accord you might say. Seemingly he was not new to it but he was not good at it. I'm not for music myself much, but let it be good music, says I, if it must be. 'There's nae luck about the hoose,' if you please; that's what he was trying to get out of the thing. That's the easiest tune to play, and they all begin with it. I daresay the laddie meant no harm. But though, thinks I, as likely as not they'd never have allowed the old man to play it in the poor's-house, still it upset me that that very old man had lost that very same whistle and that just Craig's boy had found it. Reason or not, that's what cost me my temper for a minute.

So when he came into the road, and the dog was still barking, I shouts at him: 'Don't you dare come into my garden with your noise.'

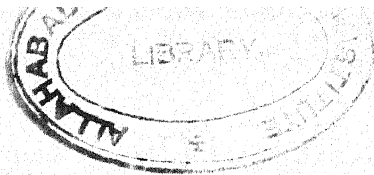
'Who's coming into your garden?' says he.

'Your noise is,' says I.

'Then shut your window,' says that boy, as bold as brass.

So I cries: 'When you come to me this day you'll get your New Year's penny and fine you know it. But only when you come civil,' I says. 'Not a minute sooner and this time not a penny more.'

With these same words (concluded Mrs. Kidd) I banged down my window, hard and angry, so that the snow fell off the frame and the poor blackies, that had nothing to do with it, went chittering up amongst the wintry trees.



The Way He Went

BY NORAH HOULT

IF you had a husband and hated him – hated him so much that it made you feel as if you could burst with hatred – it was damnable, more than damnable, to be able to do nothing about it. Mrs. Sydney Moss clenched her hands and set her mouth as she stared into the kitchen fire.

The room in which she was sitting was beautifully clean and snug. On the mantelpiece two large brass candlesticks glittered on either side of a heavy brown clock with an open, candid face. This clock bore an inscription. It had been given to Miss May Weaver on the occasion of her marriage to Mr. Sydney Moss by her fellow-members of Harcourt Street Methodist Chapel choir as a token of esteem.

The cheerful red polished linoleum on the floor represented one of those floors on which folk comment illuminatingly, if not originally, that you could eat off it. And in front of the kitchen fire, folded away during the dust and heat of the day, but laid out to grace the hours for leisure or company, was a patchwork rug, a good rug, made in her time by Mrs. Moss's mother, Mrs. Henry Weaver. Even the dull and uninteresting cheap green tablecloth gathered to itself a delusive richness under the warm and gentle glow of the white-shaded lamp.

But though Mrs. Moss cared for cleanliness, cared for order and decency and comfort in her surroundings with that urgency which is only to be found in deep and lasting loves, to-night the pleasantness of her room had no power to ease her spirit. It was seven o'clock Monday evening, and

her husband had not come in from work at his usual time, which was half-past five.

She had not seen him since Saturday midday dinner-time. Then there had been a row. A proper row! He had only given her a pound out of his wages, retaining two for himself. Well, that was more than any woman could have stood. For some time past he had been keeping back more than the pound which had been his agreed share for his own personal use, and even so he had bullied and hung round a day or two before next pay-day trying to get her to lend him some back — *lend*, that's what he called it! Though she never saw it again. But then to go and give her only one pound with which to pay the rent, to buy food, coals, light . . . she had told him what she had thought. And he had got mad and shouted at her. Then she had threatened him with a saucepan full of hot water: 'If you don't get out of my sight, I'll throw this over you,' she had said. And meant it, too. He had been scared; slunk away out of the house muttering words, muttering about paying her out. She had been too much in a rage to listen to him.

And he had stopped away the week-end. Another woman, of course. She had known that there had been another woman for some time. Well, that didn't matter. Anybody could have him who wanted cheap goods so far as she was concerned. What did matter was that he was spending the money on his fancy piece which should go to getting really warm clothes for the child, and running the house as in decency it ought to be run.

Great hulking brute! He poisoned her life so that she held herself tense when she heard his step, and when she had to speak to him her voice changed so that she did not recognize it for her own voice any longer. She didn't love little Caroline so much as she should because of the way he interfered, spoiling and kissing her so that it made her unmanageable. Funny the way she had never taken to the child as she had expected to. If she had only come by some other man. Anybody but that rotten scum!

'Final Star! Horrible murder on Preston Moor. Final.'

The newspaper boy's voice broke in on the silence which flowed round her. Preston Moor! Why, that was only a matter of ten miles away! She'd treat herself to a penn'orth, so as to take her mind off things.

She opened the hall door on a grey November evening. Only the light of the small general dealer and sweet-shop across the road twinkled merrily through the gloom of the narrow street, chiefly occupied by workmen's houses and stray shops, in which Mrs. Moss lived. The boy had passed the door, slouching carelessly along, and seeming more occupied in exercising his voice than in observing results.

'Hey there,' she called, and had to call again, 'Hey you, paper!' before he turned.

A penny changed hands. Mrs. Moss returned to her seat in front of the fire.

It was certainly a big affair! One of those murders that would get itself talked about up and down the whole of England, in London itself. Mrs. Moss thrilled a little with local pride as she read how only a few miles from where she sat in her own kitchen Miss Joan Merilees of Park House, Darwin Chase, had been done to death by strangulation — perpetrated by an unknown assailant. The body was said to have lain in the long grass, a hundred yards off the main pathway, about twelve hours before it had been discovered that morning by a van-driver, James Whitefield, who had informed the police. Identification had been made by the girl's parents who had already notified the disappearance of their daughter. They did not know she had any men friends . . . she was a quiet girl, but very popular.

Mrs. Moss read the whole story eagerly. It was as if some anger, some restless appetite within her, was slaked by this news of a crime for which the world exacted full measure, pressed down and running over, of ultimate vengeance. It was when she was glancing down the columns a second time that she heard a hammering at the door.

It would be *him*! No one else knocked with such mad-

dening and persistent volume of sound. Give him time to cool before she went.

Leisurely she laid down the paper. But her face, which had during her reading taken on an eager, almost childlike look, had changed. Now it was grim, hard; she looked a woman of whom it would be well to take heed.

The knocking which had ceased began again. He'd get the attention of the neighbours if he went on like that.

She went softly along the little passage, and opened the door suddenly. For a discomfited moment he stood in front of her, a big man with roughly hewn features and an abundance of dark hair; then he brushed past her into the kitchen. She followed him, scenting something unusual in his aspect.

His back was towards her; he was lifting the kettle off the range, and putting it on the fire. She stood observing him a moment with steady hatred. Strange, she might have thought, if her feelings had found conscious expression, that with the entrance of another human being, the room which had been a warm and tranquil haven to her in spite of her disregard, had been transformed into nothing but a place containing the man who to her represented all the evil and ugliness in the whole wide world.

But she did not give herself time for thinking. Her eye had noticed a rent in the sleeve of his coat. It had been torn down from the shoulder seam. Now he turned, slightly revealing that the back of his neck just above and below his collar was covered with scratches . . . and then she saw that each side of his face above the jaw-bone had been disfigured in the same manner.

'What have you been doing to yourself?' she asked him contemptuously - 'fighting or what? Been on the booze, I suppose. And never gone to work to-day. Taken a day's holiday, I suppose.'

He turned. 'Hold your bloody jaw,' he retorted. But his voice was quieter than she had expected.

As if tired out, he let himself into the chair, and held out

his hands to the fire. Observing him carefully, she saw that there were stains of some description down the front of his coat; that his collar had been crumpled out of any acquaintance with respectability . . . a nice mess he'd got himself in, and no mistake.

She stood staring, queer thoughts beginning to hover, though not yet taking shape, at the back of her brain. Conscious of her scrutiny, he turned sharply.

'What the bloody hell are you standing there gaping at?' He made a face, mimicking her expression. 'Get a move on, blast you. I suppose you thought you'd got rid of me for good. Well, you haven't. Get me some supper. D'ye hear what I say?'

A sharp answer was on her tongue, but somewhat to her own surprise she checked it, and moved silently towards the pantry. She laid two rashers of bacon in the frying-pan, and brought them to the fire, just as, the kettle in his hand, he went into the scullery to wash. Then she covered part of the table with newspaper: wouldn't give him the chance of messing her clean cloth, and on it laid cup and saucer, knife and fork, loaf of bread, saucer of margarine and sugar-basin. Then she returned to her frying-pan, and dished up the bacon as he re-entered.

Now he was in his shirt sleeves with his collar removed. Observing him out of the corner of her eyes she saw that this, too, was dirty and crumpled. And it had been a clean one Saturday. One thing about him was always to take a pride in his appearance . . . nothing but his beastly conceit, of course, priding himself on being a man that all the women ran after . . . but there it was. Even when, as occasionally happened, he got drunk Saturday night, he'd never come home in this state. And all those scratches!

Her gaze went to his boots, and saw how thickly they'd been embedded in dirt. Country mud that was, or she didn't know her own name. A queer sort of satisfaction was taking possession of her.

'Haven't you an egg, eh? By gum, this isn't much of a

supper to set before a hungry man. Haven't you an egg or summat?"

Now he was speaking more like himself. The hot tea which he had gulped down had brought some colour to his cheeks, which had been much whiter than was usual with him.

"There are no eggs. How can there be out of a quid which has to last the whole week?" replied Mrs. Moss. She sat down in a chair from which she could observe his movements, and picked up the newspaper again. But before reading she suddenly shot a query sharp at him. "Where did you sleep last night?"

"What's that to you? Weren't hankering after me yourself, was you?" Sydney Moss laughed, but his wife, saying no more, thought that there was an uneasiness about him. She started to read, but she found she could not make sense of the words: a feeling of mingled delight and apprehension had taken possession of her, the while she felt something warning her. "Be careful; be careful now!"

"Where's the kid?" he asked after a pause.

"Over at her aunt's. The others wanted her to stay and sleep."

He grunted, and went on eating. She knew he didn't like Caroline being at her sister's; and she had pleasure in the thought of his dissatisfaction. Still there were other fish to fry.

"Been to work to-day?" She asked him this time in a casual tone.

"No business of yours." Of course he hadn't been to work in the state he'd got himself. She rustled the paper, and felt one of her hands pressing hard on the other. Careful, careful! "Seen the *Star* this evening?" she asked him after a few moments.

He shook his head. Then his hand reached out towards her. "And it 'ere."

She passed it to him immediately, and sat back watching his face. First of all he left it down carelessly while he scraped a bit of bread round the grease left on the plate.

When the last morsel was in his mouth he took up the paper, and his face grew more intent as he saw the flaring headline. But he did not start. Instead he cut himself another slice of bread and plastered it with butter before he began to read.

She watched him so intently that he was called back. 'What's up? Staring at me like as if you never seen me before!' He stopped a moment. 'Only wish to Christ I'd never seen *you* before.'

'I was looking at those scratches on the back of your neck,' replied his wife with composure. 'Looks as if someone hasn't been too pleased with you.'

His face darkened; he dropped the paper and stood up glaring at her. For a moment she thought he was going to strike her. Then it seemed as if he checked himself, making an effort at composure. 'You . . . you make me tired,' he said, but she knew that far stronger words had been on his lips. He sat back and abruptly picked up the paper.

A spark of the expectancy within her was transmuted into joy. If that wasn't a complete give-away, she'd like to know what was. Of course, he was trying to carry it off, pretend nothing had happened. He'd had plenty of time to think out what he'd do, and what he was doing was to pretend that nothing had happened. He thought her too disdainful of him to ask questions. He thought she wouldn't put two and two together. He thought home was the safest place for him after all. She busied herself clearing the table, her mind working busily. Then as if she had made up her mind she came and sat down again.

'So you're not going to tell me what you've been doing these days, away from home,' she said in a voice which appeared almost genial. He glanced up.

'Why should I? You're not interested. You turned me out of the house Saturday, didn't you?'

She made no answer. It was as if she were turning his words over in her mind. Then she drawled, her eyes never leaving his face:

'Took a walk up Preston Moor way, maybe?'

He stared at her blankly. Oh, apparently he'd been ready for her then. 'Preston Moor! What do I want up there? You've got it on your brain, it seems.'

So. She'd have to go slowly. Mustn't rouse his suspicions. 'I thought maybe you'd come across this poor girl who's been done in,' she said in a casual voice.

'Ow, you did, did you?' He mimicked her accent.

Then he turned his chair to the fire, and in silence started to fill his pipe. An ugly look crossed his face. 'I wouldn't say,' he said, speaking deliberately, 'but what she deserved all she got.' He stood up and reached for the matches from her side of the mantelpiece. 'Most women deserve all they get,' he added. 'And you can take that from me. See?'

Feeling him standing so near, Mrs. Moss received a strong physical impression of the sheer brute masculinity of him; involuntarily she leaned away. Dared to knock *her* down, he had, once, when he had the drink in him. Not but what he was peaceable enough as a rule. Still . . . if he were roused he had an ugly temper. That's what his mother had always said of him. 'Leave him alone, and he's all right,' she'd said. 'But don't get on the wrong side of him too often.' This girl had resisted him: must have been a decent girl. Perhaps hadn't known he was a married man.

He was stooping down, and taking off his boots. The action startled her into apprehension. To-morrow he'd clean them before he went to work. His shirt wouldn't look very bad . . . they'd think it was an ordinary rent. If she didn't look mighty sharp all the evidence would be destroyed. As if in answer to her thoughts she heard him speak.

'S'pose instead of sitting there gaping at nothing you give a brush to my coat.' He jerked his head: 'It's in scullery.'

Mrs. Moss paused a moment. Then in a mild voice she said, 'How did you come to get it in such a state?'

Her husband didn't look up, but after a moment she heard him mutter, 'Slipped when I was getting on tram.'

He was lying. With a thrill of joy Mrs. Moss knew that

this time her instinct was sure. She rose, went into the scullery, looked at the coat, and then to gain time began to rinse the cup he had drunk out of.

No time to be lost. No time to be lost. If she left things till the morning he'd be up and away with his coat and shoes rubbed clean. No, no time to be lost.

Passing back into the kitchen she observed the time. Turned half-past eight. Back again out of his sight she stood still a moment, her lips pressed together, her eyes on the floor.

Yes, that was what she had to do. Go out now, go this very instant; go to the police-station in Robert Street, and ask a policeman to come along. She wouldn't say anything definite: wasn't her business to. Just tell them that her husband, Mr. Sydney Moss of ten Mincing Lane, had been away from home all the week-end, that he'd come back an hour ago covered with dirt and scratches, and refused to give any account of his movements. And that he acted very funny. Well, it was acting funny, wasn't it, for a husband to take a week-end off, not to mention a day's leave from work, and not say what he'd been up to? But it wasn't for her to say what he'd been doing of. She'd just tell the police; it was her duty to inform the police, and then they'd do what they thought. That was right. They'd do as they thought.

She turned a tap on and off again; then she moved the washing-up basin about the sink, making a clatter. Under its cover she stood for a second taking a peep at her husband's back. He was sitting back in the chair in an attitude of fatigue. She saw him draw a hand across his forehead — drowsy he was. In a few moments as likely as not he'd pop off.

Boldly she went past him out of the room. 'Where are you off to?' he called after her.

'Just got to do something upstairs,' she called back, and ran up quickly.

Putting on her hat and coat she saw in the glass that her

cheeks were flushed, and her eyes bright. Steady, she told herself as she pressed back a wisp of hair. Steady! You just go off and do your duty. Steady! Soon be over. Steady!

She went down the stairs quietly, and opened the hall door. A wind met her. She pulled the door to, wondering as she did so if he had called out. Never mind, she was well away now. And he couldn't stop her; he hadn't his boots on. When she got back she'd have police protection.

She went on her way rapidly, seeing nothing that was about her. Only the wind and the keenness of the air fanned her excitement into a sort of exultation. He'd *hang*, he'd *hang*, he'd *hang* – the words kept repeating themselves in her mind till their repetition startled her into a sort of defensive awareness. Well, a chap that interfered with a girl that didn't want him deserved hanging, didn't he? – when he murdered her as well, that was to say. Murder! At last Sydney Moss had been a little too clever. *Murder!*

Only when she approached the entrance to the police-station did her pace slacken. Now her face took on a solemn expression. She wished her heart didn't beat so. Never mind; no one would blame her. She was only doing her duty; that was it; she was doing her duty by the relatives of the deceased.

Pulling her coat tighter over her throat, she ascended the steps. A young constable, seeing her coming, opened the door. Inside the bare room, which seemed dazzlingly bright after the darkness outside, she paused uncertain; then she addressed the young man.

'I've come to give information about the murder.' She spoke in a low, quick voice. 'Where do I go?'

She saw his face, which had been surveying her with a sort of superior amusement, change into a startled gravity. 'What! the murder up on Moor?' She nodded.

He turned from her, and she watched him go up to a big desk at which another older policeman without a helmet was seated. As if in a dream she saw the two men's faces and the keen look the sergeant gave her. He'd a small dark

moustache. Looked funny, he did, without his helmet. He beckoned her, and she advanced.

'You say you know something about the Moor murder?' She nodded. He looked at her sternly: 'Now remember this is a serious matter.'

'I know it's a serious matter all right. That's why I'm here.' Mrs. Moss spoke indignantly. She hadn't come to be bullied.

'Very well then. Sit down.' A chair was brought for her. 'Name please? And address?'

Mrs. Moss supplied the information and noticed with a thrill that what she was saying was being taken down slowly and laboriously by the young policeman. 'Now then, go on.'

Mrs. Moss told her story; she told it well. Away from home these two nights; covered with scratches and dirt . . . not been to work. . . .

The sergeant interrupted her eloquence. 'How do you know he's not been to work?'

Sharp they thought themselves, didn't they! 'Because he wouldn't go to work in the state he was in; because he hadn't been home to his dinner, because he wasn't back till seven-thirty by the clock which always keeps right time, and because he let out he hadn't been to work.' Had he said so? She couldn't remember. But that was all right. Course he hadn't been to work.

She began to dislike the man behind the desk; he asked so many stupid questions. Now he was asking her another, looking her in the face as if she was a criminal. 'Got no grudge against your husband, have you, missus?'

'Grudge! No, of course not. Why should I? Just doing my duty, aren't I? I read about the murder in the paper, and there you are! I thought to myself, right's right. That's what I said to myself, "Right's right." It's no business of mine if you don't want to do anything. I've been wasting my time long enough.' She flounced up from her seat, and turned to the door.

'Hold hard!' said the sergeant. 'Just a moment, *if* you

please. You wait over there.' Standing by the door she watched the two men consulting. The young constable, having received his orders, advanced. 'I'm coming with you, ma'am,' he said, and held the door open for her to go through first.

'It's all the same to me,' said Mrs. Moss in a tart voice.

They walked on in silence. First of all Mrs. Moss held her head high. Then when people passing stared, she began to feel self-conscious. Looked as though he were taking *her* in charge. Good heavens! There was Mrs. Sellars; no, she wasn't looking; what a mercy! Good thing it was a nasty evening, not many people about.

Well, if anyone did see her, they would only think she was fetching a policeman in to her husband for doing something to her in drink. What matter if they gaped. Let them gape. She had always held herself apart from her neighbours . . . the respectable Mrs. Millbank at the post office was the only one she'd much to say to. . . . All the same, she kept a piece in front of the policeman, holding her head down, with her coat held close round her. What was going to happen in a few minutes? Would Syd fight?

They came to the house. For a second Mrs. Moss hesitated. Just through one wild moment her heart had failed – it was in her mind to say, 'It's only a joke, sorry for your trouble,' or 'I haven't got a husband.' Then her hatred came back; this was her only chance. And she had to do her duty, she had to do her duty! She opened the door, and beckoned the constable. He followed her cautiously, and then paused. 'P'raps you'd better let him know I'm here,' he said in a low voice.

A coward like all men! His irresolution was as a spark to Mrs. Moss. 'He's just here,' she said in a loud, almost cheerful voice, and went through to the kitchen.

Sydney Moss had fallen into a doze, but their entrance had awakened him. 'What's this?' he said, blinking up at his wife. In a muddled way he rose to his feet, gathering the impression that company was just arriving.

'You're wanted,' said Mrs. Moss to him in a harsh voice. She stood on one side awaiting the policeman who came forward.

'What the 'ell?' said Mr. Moss, astonished.

The policeman consulted his notebook. 'You Sydney Moss, of ten Mincing Lane?'

'That's right.'

The policeman felt uncomfortable; the man in front of him standing in his shirt-sleeves looked so genuinely surprised that he became convinced he'd been brought on a fool's errand. To cover his distaste he spoke gruffly. 'Information has been given that you absented yourself from work to-day, that you've been away from home since noon of Saturday the eighteenth inst., and that you returned at seven o'clock to-night in suspicious circumstances with your face scratched and your clothing torn, and that you refuse to give your wife here an account of your movements.'

'And so she slipped out to tell you all about it!' Mr. Moss slapped his thigh. 'Well, that's a good one.' He laughed.

His laughter irritated the policeman. Mrs. Moss broke in: 'Look at his face, look at his face. Covered with scratches. And they're at the back of his neck, too. Tell him to turn round and show you. A human hand done them, or I don't know anything. Wait a moment' - she was in and out of the scullery in an instant - 'Look here. His coat all torn! Here's his collar. Those there are the boots he's just taken off. Look at the mud on them.' The constable examined each of the phenomena indicated in leisurely fashion. He began to write in his notebook.

'Look 'ere,' cried Sydney Moss, getting angry. 'Stow all this. What's up? What the 'ell's wrong? Who says I ain't been to work to-day?' He paused to look at his wife, and illumination came. 'My eye,' he said in a low, amazed tone. 'She thinks I done that woman in up on Moor. Is that it?'

'Understand,' said the policeman. 'No charge is being made against you. But it's my duty to ask you to give an

account of your movements on the evening of Sunday, the nineteenth inst.'

'Be 'anged if I will,' cried Sydney Moss. 'Leastways,' he added, remembering that a policeman was a policeman, 'not before her.' He jerked his thumb towards his wife.

'I must ask you to step up with me to the station then,' said the policeman. Mr. Moss paused to think. 'It will save trouble in the end,' he added in a less official tone. The two men looked at each other, and Mrs. Moss was excluded from that look.

Mr. Moss made his decision. 'Right you are,' he said, and sat down, drawing on his boots. Mrs. Moss watched him, discomfited. 'You haven't got anything on me, mate,' he said almost cheerily to the policeman as he went for his overcoat. He wound a scarf about his neck in place of a collar. 'Leastways,' he added, 'nothing that you can put me in quod for.'

'Right you are,' said the policeman.

As in a dream Mrs. Moss saw them go. Her husband did not give her a look; even the policeman did not utter a 'Good evening.'

Better get that bit of ironing done. She wasn't going to stand there staring. All the same . . . she hadn't thought he'd go so quiet. Never mind. She'd done her duty. Not think about it any more. That was best.

But when she got to bed she tossed and turned. There were so many pictures appearing before her excited brain: at one moment she saw Sydney in the dock with the judge putting on his black cap. And Sydney was looking round, looking for her; at another, everyone was pointing at her — the wife who had sent her husband to the gallows; at another she was being acclaimed as a heroine who held what was right dearer to her than her own flesh and blood; at another Sydney came back; he had got them to let him off, and he was thrashing her unmercifully while policemen stood by. Her body trembled and shook.

Again it was the question of ways and means that per-

plexed her. With Syd gone, how was she to make a living for herself and the child? Would there be a subscription got up? Not for the wife of a murderer. But then she herself it was who had . . . never mind. Would he get off? Hadn't he done it? It was not until the pale fever-dispelling light of day came that she dropped into a brief and troubled slumber.

★

She was washing up her breakfast things when he came back. He brushed past her and went without a word into the scullery and turned on the tap. With a courage that had something in it of gallantry she lingered in the kitchen.

But when he had dried his face he went past her again without a word. She heard him go upstairs and move about overhead in the bedroom. Everything stopped within her while she waited. But she made a pretence of going on with her work.

At last he came down and stood in the doorway. She turned towards him but though she heard his voice she could not meet his eyes. Only she saw that he had a bag in his hand.

'I'm going now,' he said. 'Going to work. And I'm not coming back. Get that in your head. I'm not coming back. Not to-night, nor yet to-morrow night, nor night after. We haven't hit it for a long while now, but I've stuck it' - he jerked his head - 'for sake of the kid. I'll see what's to be done about her. I'm her father still. But I'm not living in the same house with you again.' He paused. A look that was almost childlike in its puzzled desire to comprehend came in his eyes. 'Why! you'd be poisoning me next.'

Mrs. Moss tried to speak. The words, 'Maybe I was a bit hasty' came into her head, but her tongue was stiff. She stood staring past him.

'Some men would give you a hiding. Well, I'm not going to do that. I'm just done with you. D'ye see? I'm just done with you.'

Still she couldn't speak.

He turned away, and looked back. 'I'll send for the rest of the things I want, and I'll fix things up later. But I gotta go to work now.'

He took a few steps away, and then paused, looking for the first time full at that still averted face. 'You allus thought yourself too much of a lady for the likes of me, too good for me, you thought yourself, didn't you? Well, I reckon I'm a bit too good for you now - that's all.'

The door closed. He had gone. Mrs. Moss still stood tense for a few moments as if listening. Then she relaxed, and sat down heavily in a chair, her hand pressed to her heart.

'P'raps he done it after all,' she told herself, but the assurance had no conviction.

Her chin sagged on to her chest. She didn't know how she felt - only that she was being emptied; that her long cherished feelings of hate and anger were being taken from her, that she was being sucked dry. Yes, that was how she felt, very tired - and very empty. There didn't seem to be anything that mattered much in the world any more.

The Last Rose of Summer

BY EILUNED LEWIS

MISS HARRIET POSTLETHWAITE lived with Mademoiselle Hortense de la Tour at No. 5 Rue St. Gingolphe, Lausanne. To say that they lived there together would be to give a wrong impression. Miss Postlethwaite lived apologetically and gratefully with Mademoiselle de la Tour. The Rue St. Gingolphe runs uphill. It is a cobbled street, with a wall on one side overhung with acacia trees and covered at intervals with advertisements of chocolate and that international commodity, 'Singer's Sewing Machine.' On the opposite side the windows of the houses were shuttered from morning till night, and the plaster peeled slowly in the sun. Over the door of No. 5 a smudgy brass plate announced that a certain société anonyme had its offices on the ground floor; once you had pushed open the heavy outer door, a visiting card informed you that Mademoiselle de la Tour might be found on the first floor.

No. 5 had always belonged to the de la Tours from the days when it was their town house only, and St. Gingolphe a fashionable quarter of Lausanne. With the gentle decline of the family, the floors had been let in turn: the ground floor to the secretary of a limited liability company, who lived on the spot with his wife, while the wide garrets were given over to the storing of furniture. Only the first floor retained its ancient dignity, and the lofty rooms, that opened one from the other, something of their former grace. In the drawing-room, with its parquet floor and Louis-Philippe furniture which had been fashionable at the time of her parents' marriage, Mdlle Hortense would sit a great deal

of the day, embroidering with her fine hands, that were so much younger and smoother than her face, reading a French novel, or the *Gazette de Lausanne*, that lay folded every day at half-past one beside her cup of black coffee. The windows of the drawing-room looked on to a small garden behind the house – a garden that was full of yellow eschscholtzias and old-fashioned roses of a dull, purplish pink, matching in colour the crinkled velvet that covered the Louis-Philippe furniture. There were also some currant bushes and a lime tree at the corner of the house, from which, every year, the pale-green flowers were picked at Mdlle's direction, dried on shelves and made into tisane.

Mdlle herself worked in the garden, wearing a hat of fine straw and a flowered apron and gloves. Every summer's evening she and Harriet watered the beds with a hose, Mdlle calling out when it was time to turn off the tap. The tenants on the ground floor had perforce to share the garden, but they were harmless, simple people, too shy to appear there at the same time as Mdlle Hortense.

Very occasionally, Mdlle Hortense, who had studied music at the conservatoire, would open the piano (a fine one of French make) and play to herself. Whenever Mdlle played it seemed to Harriet that the room was filled with uneasy spirits, until she would creep as near as possible to the chink of light that fell through the shutters – not so much to count the stitches of her crochet as to escape from the fierce abandon of Mdlle Hortense.

Privately, Harriet nursed a fondness for simple tunes such as Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words*, and the forgotten gaiety of some Viennese dances which she had heard played at a concert in Lausanne. She herself could play little beyond hymn-tunes (she kept a copy of *Hymns Ancient and Modern* in her bedroom) and a few pieces by heart, such as *Robin Adair*, and a sad little tune called *Forget-me-not*, which had once lived in some Victorian album, but now existed only in Miss Postlethwaite's memory and at the tips of her bird-like fingers. She had a way of joining it inextricably

on to the beginning of *Robin Adair* – which again melted into the hymn *Brief life is here our portion*.

But Harriet only dared play when she knew herself to be alone; Mdlle Hortense was already sufficiently annoyed by the insistent piano-practising from the house next door – a *pension* much frequented by English schoolgirls, who kept their windows open and played their pieces in a slovenly manner.

‘I beg you to close the window, Harriet,’ said Mdlle Hortense. ‘A draught is sufficiently annoying, without being forced to listen to that *tapage*.’ And Harriet, although she had been secretly enjoying the sounds of Schumann’s *Träumerei*, hastened to shut the window.

It was eighteen years since Harriet had come to live in Lausanne as young companion to an aunt who had married, late in life, a Swiss Protestant pastor, and then developed an incurable disease. That she died eventually in the greatest possible comfort was due to Harriet’s devotion. On the death of his wife, the pastor went to end his days with his own relations in Bâle. Harriet was thrown upon the world, and the world proved kind. Chief among the members of her uncle’s congregation in the Place Guillaume Tell was the family of de la Tour, descendants of old Swiss nobility. The venerable Madame de la Tour needed someone to wind her wool and wheel her bath-chair up the cobbled streets of Lausanne, and Harriet was an expert winder and pusher.

In those days there was life at No. 5. Mdlle Hortense, the brilliant and incisive daughter, brought a circle of admirers to the house. Roger Jacquotet, the clever young surgeon, Emile Roux, whose people owned half the vineyards between Lausanne and Morges, and stiff Swiss officers in grey-blue uniform, who came there with René, Madame’s only son. René de la Tour, who had taken up the profession of arms, had the family profile – curved nose and charming lips beneath a fair moustache. In him Harriet saw the worthy descendant of knights who had freed the canton

from foreign invasion, and when René held open the door for her with a bow, or practised his few words of English, her heart was thrown into a flutter. Soon after she came to live at No. 5, René married pretty plump Andrée St. Ourse, and their one child, Jacqueline, was the great joy of her aunt Hortense, who had refused or frightened away all her own suitors.

When old Madame de la Tour died, the country house above the lake, where the black cherries and the white grapes ripened in the sunshine, was sold, but Harriet stayed on. By this time, the war had broken out and already there were floods of refugees to feed and clothe, as well as socks to be knitted for the Swiss army, mobilized and waiting on its frontiers.

Certainly times were difficult: food was scarce, the drain on fixed incomes was severe and René de la Tour, by this time 'M. le Colonel,' came back from the frontier looking old and ill. His wife was never much of a manager, and the last of the vineyards was sold.

'Jacqueline must make a good match,' said Mdlle Hortense.

At least once a year, Mdlle Hortense visited her cousin, Thérèse de la Tour, in her house in the wooded foothills of the Jura. Towards the end of June, when the first flight of roses were beginning to drop their petals and the currants to ripen, Mdlle Thérèse wrote to say that she was far from well.

'Thérèse had always a poor constitution,' said Mdlle Hortense. 'For that reason,' she added dryly, 'she makes it worse by living in the country all the year round.'

'I always think Gimel a charming spot,' Harriet ventured to remark.

'Quite charming, my dear, for those who care to fight the mosquitoes all summer. As for staying in the country all winter, such a life is fit only for the beasts.'

Nevertheless, Thérèse was ill, and must be visited. An expedition was accordingly arranged for the following day, but

in the morning Mdlle Hortense was indisposed. Harriet found her sitting up in bed, wearing a yellow wrapper which did not suit her complexion at that early hour.

'How do you find yourself?' asked Harriet anxiously.

'I have a migraine, and I am suffering atrociously from my kidneys,' was the reply.

Even a score of years on the Continent had not accustomed Harriet to the frank discussion of her own interior, but she had long been on familiar terms with the nervous and organic troubles of the de la Tour family.

'Then you will not go to Gimel?' she asked.

'With the help of a *calmant*, there is no reason why I should not go. My poor Thérèse is certain to be in a worse state, and without any of the proper remedies.'

'Then I shall come with you,' announced Harriet. 'You cannot go on that expedition alone.' She was busy searching for the desired *calmant* among the numerous small bottles on the shelf, and for once, Mdlle Hortense allowed someone else to settle a question.

Immediately after an early *déjeuner*, the two ladies set out for the railway station. Alice, the rosy German-Swiss maid, walked behind carrying Mdlle's bag. Harriet carried a smaller bag, containing a bottle of orange-flower water, a bunch of lime-flowers and a packet of the dried stalks of cherries. Alice came as far as the station platform where she set down the bag and then hurried home to feed her young man on the remains of the *déjeuner*.

Meanwhile Mdlle and Harriet travelled in a second-class carriage through the outskirts of Lausanne and for some distance along the shore of the lake. The carriage was unpleasantly crowded, clearly something was afoot: from the conversation of two girls, with swinging plaits, and a young man in a beret, they learnt that there was a regatta at Rolle, and a *fête de natation*.

'How tiresome that it should be to-day,' said Mdlle Hortense. 'This crowd is not agreeable.'

At Rolle, she and Harriet climbed down from their car-

riage and made their way to the tram-line that led from the lake to the vine-covered hills above.

'Thank you, my dear Harriet, there is no need for you to come any further,' said Mdlle Hortense, when they reached the stationary tram-car. 'The air has restored me a little, and Thérèse is sure to send her maid to meet me. Place the small bag carefully on the seat. You will be in good time to catch the train back at two o'clock.'

With an expression of courage and resignation on her face, Mdlle Hortense settled herself in the corner seat and pulled down the wooden shutter that kept out the sunshine. The conductor shouted '*Agissez!*' to the last comers, and Harriet smiled and waved as the tram lurched slowly up the hill on its long climb to Gimel.

Harriet stood alone on the dusty road. The departure of the next train back to Lausanne was not due for twenty-five minutes. Now, whether it was the hot sunshine which struck out of the sky on to the ripening grapes, or the infectious gaiety of the crowd in its holiday clothes that went to Harriet's head, I cannot say. Possibly the fact that she had just waved good-bye to her benefactress, and knew that she would not see her again for twenty-four hours, had something to do with her novel and extraordinary behaviour. The fact remains that Harriet, instead of walking back to the station away from the vulgar crowd and there sitting patiently on a platform bench, deliberately threw away the return half of her ticket and joined herself to the stream of people who were descending the hill, laughing and singing, towards Rolle and the regatta.

'I'll just find out if there's a boat back to Ouchy,' said Harriet to herself. 'It will be much pleasanter than the train this hot day.'

A troop of young people, arms linked, singing and straggling across the road, passed her. One of them, a girl in a yellow frock, with sunburnt arms, turned and laughed at Harriet as she passed, and Harriet laughed back.

At Rolle, the crowd was immense. There were flags

across the street, people leaned out of the upstairs windows, and family parties sat drinking beer at the little tables outside the cafés. The worthy Swiss citizen was out to enjoy himself, while threading their way through the streets were the sunburnt yachtsmen of the lake, in white duck trousers, gay little white caps with scarlet pom-poms and an air of *opéra bouffe*. On the landing-stage, the crowd was worse than ever. Harriet grew quite nervous as she squeezed herself timidly into a queue of waiting people. From here, she had a good view of the water and the swarm of motor craft that buzzed like gnats round the lazy, square-bottomed sailing boats with their bird-like sails. A race between two rowing boats was on the point of starting and the competing crews – stripped to their waists – were getting into place. A pistol-shot and they were off – the cox, like the conductor of an orchestra, standing up to direct the crew.

Harriet stood on tiptoe excitedly. It was perhaps a little shocking to see so much of the human body, and yet how beautiful they were, those bare, bronzed young men in their painted boats on the bright water. To Harriet's eyes, they were no longer stolid Swiss youths, but heroes of Greek legend, driving their barks over the wine-dark sea, instead of the placid surface of Lac Lemman. Someone touched her on the shoulder, and a soft voice murmured:

'Bonjour, Mademoiselle!'

Harriet turned quickly.

'Jacqueline, my dear child, what are you doing here?'

'I am watching the regatta, like you, Mademoiselle. It is amusing, is it not? I hope so much that the men of Rolle will beat the crew from Morges. Look! Now they have turned the corner! And here comes our steamer. Do you return at once to Ouchy, or will you wait to see the next race?'

'Certainly not! I am returning at once,' said Harriet, completely recalled to herself by this unexpected encounter. What in the world was Jacqueline de la Tour, Monsieur René's precious only child, doing alone at a lakeside fête?

Though as far as that went, what exactly was Harriet doing there herself?

Her thoughts were interrupted by the ear-piercing screech of the approaching steamer and the movement of the crowd towards the narrow gangway. Harriet and Jacqueline found seats on the deck next to an elderly German couple, wearing blue glasses and busily eating slices of sausage from a mackintosh bag. Jacqueline wrinkled her pretty nose and unfurled a pink parasol between herself and her neighbours, but Harriet, still delighted in the novelty of her day, settled down to study the other passengers.

Seated opposite her was a man who, she felt certain, was English. The fact that he was reading the *Revue des Deux Mondes* did not alter her conviction. Everything about him, from his soft hat, his lean face and grizzled moustache, to his tweed jacket, presented a striking contrast to the group of young Swiss men beside him – plump young men with stumpy fingers, wearing ‘boater’ hats of coarse straw, suits of black broadcloth and well-filled pleated shirts. They talked and joked with one another, until one of them fell asleep, with his mouth open.

Jacqueline gazed in front of her at the water, but Harriet could not prevent her eyes from returning to the Englishman. She liked the careful way in which he cut the pages of his review with a small penknife. His hands, she noticed, were long and shapely and a little freckled.

There was a sudden scraping sound and an exclamation of amused dismay from Jacqueline.

‘What a misfortune! We have placed ourselves near the musicians!’

Near by, three curious-looking men were busy setting up their music-stands, and now, led by a young man with a tangle of black hair, they burst into the tune of the *Blue Danube*. Jacqueline looked round for a way of escape, but Harriet did not move. She knew that these people were not playing particularly well; even her ear could detect that they were sometimes flat. Mdlle Hortense would have been

horrified at such sounds, but Harriet greeted it as one more sensation in this incredibly thrilling day, as something that fitted into the pattern of sunshine, the movement of water and the chatter of the passengers, so that everything and everyone – even the German couple in their blue spectacles, and the young Swiss in their hard straw hats, were infected with the gaiety and languor of the Viennese waltz.

The waltz drew to its voluptuous end, and then these queer musicians – who must surely have had designs that day on Harriet's heart – fell to playing old Scottish and English airs. They played *The Flowers of the Forest* and *Mowing the Barley* and *Early One Morning*, while Harriet listened entranced; gone was the boat-load of foreigners and the mountainous shores of Lac Lemman, while Harriet remembered the cloudy skies of England and a garden that was full of humming bees and scented stock.

'Jacqueline,' she cried excitedly, 'they are playing English airs. I cannot find the name for this one, and yet I know it so well. I know someone who used to sing it. . . . Oh, dear! Now they've stopped! And now I shall never remember.'

'Pardon, Mademoiselle. If you will permit me?' The Englishman was speaking in slow French. 'Perhaps I can help you. Was it not *The Last Rose of Summer*?'

'Oh, dear,' thought Harriet, 'he thinks I'm Swiss. How ridiculous!'

Blushing and embarrassed, she thanked him in English, at which it was his turn to look foolish.

'How stupid of me! Of course, anyone knowing that tune would be English!'

Jacqueline asked in her cool little voice:

'Monsieur finds the music to his taste?'

'It reminds me of home,' the stranger replied, 'which is always pleasing to an Englishman.'

They had gone back to French, in order to include Jacqueline in the conversation, but Jacqueline had chosen to be perverse.

'The English, it seems, are not difficult to please,' she remarked.

'Perhaps you play yourself, Mademoiselle?' the Englishman asked. 'It develops the critical faculty.'

'She plays extremely well,' said Harriet enthusiastically, while Jacqueline pouted and denied the fact.

'There is no one so enviable as a musician,' said the Englishman gravely, and added, 'I suppose you have many good concerts at Lausanne.'

'Not too bad. You heard Cortot last week?' Jacqueline asked.

'I'm afraid not. I have only just arrived in Lausanne.'

'But this is not your first visit?'

'My first.'

'Then tell us what you think of it,' said Jacqueline eagerly. 'It is a dull town, is it not, compared with London and Paris? What would I not give to spend next winter in London! Ah, that would be *chic*, would it not, Mdlle Harriet?'

The Englishman smiled: 'I shouldn't bother to spend a winter in London,' he said. 'It's much too dark and dirty for you.'

'Messieurs et Mesdames! Le thé est servi.'

A man with a bell was making his way through the crowd, announcing loudly that refreshments were to be had below. The stranger stood up bowing. Would the ladies, he asked, honour him by partaking of tea? Here was an excellent English custom which should not be ignored. Harriet looked doubtfully at Jacqueline. What would Madame de la Tour and Mdlle Hortense say to such a stray invitation, she wondered. But Jacqueline too was having her day out. Charming, and with the right degree of favour given and favour received, she accepted the invitation for both of them.

Over that comfortable English institution, which the French call 'complete tea,' they learnt that their companion was a professor of history, and that he had come to Lausanne to collect material for a critical study of the historian Gibbon.

'And have you visited the garden where Gibbon used to write?' asked Harriet. :

'Not yet. I hope to go there to-morrow.'

'Ah, but it is too pretty a spot for such a horrid man as your Gibbon,' Jacqueline interposed. 'There is a walk under the trees from which you may see the lake and the mountains. It is charming.'

'And so you think Gibbon was "horrid"?' The Professor was amused. 'Well, he certainly treated one woman very badly. But cannot we all three visit the garden together?'

Here was the moment, thought Harriet, when she should assert her authority over Jacqueline, decline any more invitations and break the spell that bound them all. But the air of the saloon was warm and drowsy; through the port-hole at her side she watched the green water and the brightly coloured shore slip by, and while she sipped her tea, she heard Jacqueline arranging a rendezvous for all three on the following afternoon.

'Jacqueline, dear,' she murmured, 'it is impossible. I am sure that Madame your mother will want you to be with her.'

'No, she won't. She is going to a diplomatic party at Berne, and you know that Tante Hortense will not be back from Gimel till evening.'

'It is my day for teaching at the Blind School,' said Harriet. 'I do not think I can possibly come.'

Harriet was at her last fence, but Jacqueline swept it away.

'And you know quite well that the Blind School is near by – not two minutes' walk away. Think what an occasion it is – an important work on your great English historian! And afterwards we will go to the Signal and show the Professor the view and have strawberry ices.'

'Jacqueline, dear!' Harriet remonstrated.

The Professor smiled.

'Do come,' he said. 'It would be such a pleasure to a lonely fellow-countryman. If I asked the little violinist to

play *The Last Rose of Summer* again, would it melt your heart?"

Harriet blushed, and Jacqueline asked,
"What are the words of this song?"

But the Professor would not tell her.

The ship's bell was ringing and the waiter came to tell them that they were nearing Ouchy. Harriet and Jacqueline hurried on deck, followed by the Professor.

"Then it is agreed?" he asked eagerly. "We meet at half-past three to-morrow?"

And Harriet, flushed and flustered, agreed. It was odd, she thought, that he should look so pleased. But then anyone would be delighted to meet Jacqueline again. She had never looked prettier than she did to-day, in her white frock and shady hat, thought Harriet, as she followed her down the gangway.

The Professor saw them politely into their tram and stood, hat in hand, till they had clanked round the corner.

"What a day!" exclaimed Jacqueline, leaning back with laughing eyes. Harriet, hunting through her bag for her tram ticket, agreed. But that evening, she watered the garden of No. 5 more thoroughly than ever before – as a form of expiation to Mdlle Hortense.

★

"And now," said the Professor, "where shall we go next?"

It was four o'clock on the following afternoon, and they had spent an amusing half-hour searching for the site of Gibbon's summer-house and the famous walk under the acacia trees overlooking the lake, while the Professor related anecdotes of Gibbon, Susan Curchod and Voltaire. Under his skilful touch, eighteenth-century Lausanne lived again. Harriet and Jacqueline discovered how much more the Professor knew of its history than they did themselves.

And now it seemed they were three friends of long-standing, discussing where they should spend the rest of the sunny afternoon.

"You ought to see the Cathedral," said Harriet.

'And the Market Place,' added Jacqueline. 'And we'll finish up with the view from the Signal.'

They climbed the steep streets together and crossed the Place, that flung back at them the strong white sunshine. The great Gothic cathedral, swept bare by the spirit of Calvin, received them coldly as some sea-cave.

Harriet never cared much for the inside of churches, though she liked looking at the rose window in the cathedral transept. She sat down now before it, while Jacqueline led the Professor to the stone effigies, and the tomb of one of her warrior ancestors, lying next to the Dukes of Savoy. There was, it seemed, a great deal to interest the Professor in Lausanne Cathedral.

Afterwards, they visited the Market Place and threaded their way through the booths, laden with vegetables, wooden toys and great yellow cheeses, the shape and size of grind-stones. At the flower-stall, the Professor bought two bunches of carnations: yellow ones for Jacqueline and pink ones for Harriet. He presented them to both ladies with a bow, while they laughed and protested.

Harriet thought, 'They are the first flowers that have been given to me since René used to bring me roses,' and remembered a day at the de la Tours' country house on the lake, when they had all helped to gather the grapes - so many young people, all laughing and talking. She was a girl of eighteen then, just Jacqueline's age and thrilled by a new country. She stole a look at Jacqueline in her frock of yellow linen, and thought: 'How pretty she looks! He has chosen the right coloured flowers.'

'And now what about that view from the top of the hill?' said the Professor gaily.

'You mean the Signal?' cried Jacqueline. 'Of course, we must go there!'

Above their heads, a church clock boomed five times, and Harriet gave an exclamation of dismay.

'I must go at once. And you too, Jacqueline. Mdlle Hortense will be back already. I had no idea it was so late.'

'Oh, but our visit to the Signal and the ices,' Jacqueline lamented.

'Mesdemoiselles, I am desolate,' said the Professor. 'It is entirely my fault for having kept you here so long. Will you be so good as to give me the pleasure of your company to-morrow? and I shall try to make amends by taking you straight to the top of this hill and ordering all the strawberry ices we can find.'

'To-morrow, I am not sure,' said Jacqueline. '*Maman* may have other plans. But Thursday, perhaps?'

The Professor looked at Harriet:

'Any day will suit me. You will say "Yes," won't you?' he asked.

Before Harriet could reply, Jacqueline had slipped an arm through hers and answered for both of them.

'At the funicular at four o'clock on Thursday. *Au revoir, Monsieur.*'

He thanked them warmly. At the top of the Rue St. Gingoïphe, Harriet and Jacqueline parted, and Harriet hurried home.

Mdlle Hortense was not in the best of tempers.

'I hoped you would be in when I returned,' she remarked. 'Surely you have stayed longer than usual at the Blind School? This hot day has quite worn me out, and Thérèse was most unreasonable.'

Harriet said nothing, but she hid her carnations in her room, and took all of them (except one flower) to the Children's Hospital next day.

That night and for the following twenty-four hours, Harriet was extremely unhappy. She decided that she had done very wrong. She was guilty of misdemeanour in that she, Harriet Postlethwaite, had led astray the young and innocent Jacqueline. This whole predicament had arisen from that extraordinary day on the lake.

There was no doubt about it. The Professor was in love with Jacqueline. Under the bedclothes, Harriet's cheeks burned at the terrific words. And it was Harriet who

through her own weakness and vanity had encouraged the affair from the beginning - an affair that could only end in unhappiness. With shuddering fancy, she heard already the roll of battle: all the heavy artillery of the family brought to bear on this intruder.

When Thursday morning dawned, Harriet rose, pale and full of desperate resolve. As soon as her household tasks were done, she would make some excuse to Mdlle and go herself to Jacqueline. And she would be firm; she would show Jacqueline that although she had been weak in the past, she could, if need be, assert herself. But while she was still dusting the Sèvres china in the drawing-room, Alice, the little smiling maid, brought her a note with great secrecy, and told her that one of Monsieur le Colonel's servants had left it with instructions that it was to be given to Mdlle Harriet in private.

The note was from Jacqueline, and ran:

I am unlucky! Maman insists on my accompanying her to Madame Y's At Home this afternoon. Therefore, dear Harriet, you must meet our nice Professor without me and consume twice as many ices as you would otherwise have done. Tell the Professor I am broken-hearted, and be sure that you show him all there is to be seen from the Signal.

JACQUELINE.

So that was that. Harriet slipped the letter into her pocket with a sigh of relief. The way was now clear before her. She would meet the Professor at the funicular, tell him that he would never see Jacqueline again and then say good-bye. 'And a good thing too,' said Harriet sharply to herself. It was ridiculous, the way she had allowed this matter to fill her thoughts.

At a quarter to four, Mdlle Hortense was lying on the drawing-room sofa with the shutters closed, a bottle of eau-de-Cologne beside her and a glass of orange-flower water within reach. Harriet closed the front door behind her and

stepped into the burning street with the air of a conspirator. Holding her parasol over her head, she walked rapidly all the way, and arrived, warm and breathless, at the foot of the funicular.

The Professor was already there and came to meet her.

'How good of you to come!' he said. 'I was horribly afraid you might think the day too hot for any more expeditions.'

'Jacqueline is not here,' began Harriet, although the fact was obvious. 'She was prevented from coming. I have come to say good-bye to you, from both of us.'

Now that she had said it, it sounded foolish.

The Professor smiled.

'We must not begin our day with farewells,' he said gaily. 'I am sorry about Mdlle Jacqueline, but I am sure you are such an excellent guide that we shall get on very well. I have the tickets ready, and here is the little train. Shall we go?'

It was, of course, absurd of Harriet to step into the funicular. On the other hand, she could not very well keep the Professor standing in the hot street while she explained to him the financial position of the de la Tours, their blue blood, their ideas on matrimony, and the importance that they laid on the conventions.

'I'll explain everything when we get to the top,' said Harriet to herself. 'It will be a good opportunity.'

Meanwhile the little train of open wooden compartments was being drawn slowly and inexorably up the hill, brushing the green branches on either side. The Professor was disposed to be amused with everything, and started a conversation with a round-eyed child who had clambered on the back of the seat in front of them. The most ordinary things, Harriet reflected, when they happened in the company of the Professor, had a spice of adventure.

The Signal is the top of a wooden hill that dominates Lausanne. It is set out with shady benches, beds of bright geraniums and gay little kiosks, where you may buy ices,

glasses of grenadine and English tea. Harriet had not been there for years, for Mdlle Hortense considered such expeditions foolish, suited only to visitors with time to waste, and there were never any visitors now at No. 5. What a pity it was, thought Harriet, that people did not waste more time. To-day was certainly made for the occupation. Down in Lausanne it was hot and sultry, but here was the cool shade of lime and acacia and a delicious breeze from the mountains that ruffled the hair on Harriet's forehead.

Meantime the Professor had discovered the indicator on the terrace, and Harriet stood beside him, pointing out the names of the great Alps that towered before them, and which the Professor was quicker at finding than she was. The lake stretched smiling at their feet, with Evian on the opposite shore, Vevey and Montreux at their left and the speck that was Chillon.

'You must visit Chillon one day,' said Harriet.

'Will you come with me?' asked the Professor.

'This,' said Harriet to herself, 'is the moment to explain.'

'I am afraid,' she began gently, 'that what I tried to say just now, at the bottom of the funicular, is quite true. Jacqueline and I will not be able to come any more expeditions with you - expeditions,' she added hastily, 'which have given us both so much pleasure.'

She paused painfully, not knowing how to proceed, and the Professor came to her rescue.

'I am sorry about Mdlle Jacqueline,' he said, 'but did I understand you to say that you too are deserting me? You are leaving Lausanne, perhaps?'

'Oh, no, not that!' said Harriet. 'But it is quite impossible for Jacqueline de la Tour . . .'

'With your permission,' the Professor interrupted, 'we will leave Jacqueline out of the question altogether.'

He spoke quite sternly and Harriet thought:

'He's taking it very oddly. I suppose that's the way people do.'

'Shall we sit down?' the Professor went on. 'There is a

seat over here where we shall not be disturbed,' and he led the way.

For a few moments they sat in silence. From the tree overhead came the sound of wood-pigeons, crooning to each other and then stopping suddenly in the middle, as though they had fallen asleep. That was just the way, thought Harriet, that they had crooned in her grandfather's garden – that English garden, full of purple stocks and sweet-scented pinks. How they smelt after a shower of rain! Nothing would ever smell so sweet again – nothing, at least, in her life. The Professor was speaking at her side. 'I had meant to ask you a favour,' he said gravely, 'but now I shall not dare to do so.'

His voice was so sad that Harriet looked up quickly.

'Please ask me,' she said. 'If there is anything that I can do, I shall be so happy.'

'You mean that? But perhaps you will change your mind when you hear what it is.'

Harriet thought, 'It's a message for Jacqueline,' but she answered, 'Do tell me!'

'I wish to know,' said the Professor, 'if I may call on you, if I may see you again; whether in fact, you will allow this friendship, which has meant so much to me, to continue?'

Harriet sat in silence, and the voice, strained and pleading now, went on at her side.

'I must speak. You have forced me to it.'

'There is some dreadful mistake,' thought Harriet. 'I ought to stop him.' But she said nothing.

'I know that I should be asking you to give up a charming home,' continued the Professor, 'and friends in this lovely country.'

'Oh,' thought Harriet, 'does he know what it is like in the Rue St. Gingolphé? All the shutters closed and Mdlle Hortense's migraine!'

'I am not a rich man.' (What was he saying now? Riches! For Harriet, who had never had a penny to spend on herself!)

'But perhaps a home in England,' continued this extraordinary man, 'a home of your own would hold some compensations.'

It was all a mistake, thought Harriet, an appalling mistake. For some reason, which she could not understand, the Professor had all kinds of strange ideas about her. She must explain at once that they were wrong; but how could she make him understand that, after all, she was only Harriet Postlethwaite, the niece of the pastor's wife and the humble companion of Mdlle de la Tour?

The Professor was speaking again.

'I have been too sudden. Of course, you do not know me well enough. Forgive me if I have upset you.'

Clasping and unclasping her hands on the handle of her parasol, Harriet found words at last.

'Professor, you are mistaken. I am not the kind of person you imagine me to be; not clever at all, in fact I am very foolish and ignorant. I have done so little in my life. I have always been part of other people's lives.'

What was she saying? She had never before tried to put into words her relationship with her aunt and Mdlle Hortense, and yet she knew that for the first time in her life she had spoken the truth about herself.

The Professor said gently:

'I have not been at all mistaken. It was clear to me from the first moment we met that you never thought of yourself. Perhaps, in the future, you will allow others to think for you. Will you let me hope that I may be that one?'

'Oh, but you would not want that,' Harriet protested.

'You mean, *you* would never want it?' He was sad and puzzled.

'You would so soon be disappointed,' she said desperately.

'And you?' he asked.

'For me,' said Harriet simply, 'it would be too much happiness,' and she covered her face with her hands. What would have happened next I leave to the imagination of the patient and sympathetic reader, for at that moment, an

elderly gentleman, with white moustaches, who had been studying the view through a pair of field-glasses, approached the bench on which Harriet and the Professor sat.

'Pardon me,' he said, raising his hat to Harriet, who had hastily uncovered her face. 'Can you tell me whether the magnificent peak we see on our left is the Grand Muveran?'

The Professor jumped to his feet. He looked suddenly quite young and boyish.

'Without a moment's hesitation, Monsieur,' he replied, sweeping off his hat, 'I should say that it is.'

'A thousand thanks, Monsieur. I am not, as you gather, a native of these parts, but I have travelled a great deal during my life, and I can assure you and Madame,' and he bowed to Harriet - 'that I have never seen a more beautiful prospect, nor one more calculated to fill the mind with peaceful reflections.'

'Monsieur,' replied the Professor, 'you have expressed admirably the very words that were in my mind. Come, my dear,' he turned to Harriet, and offered his arm. 'Suppose we go and find a little refreshment. I am sure you are needing it.' And with more bows and salutations, they left the old gentleman sitting in the shade, scanning the horizon with his field-glasses.

The Professor and Harriet parted late that afternoon outside No. 5, where the acacia trees over the wall were dropping their blossom into the dusty street. Jacqueline was in the drawing-room. She had called on her way back from Madame Y's At Home, and was lovely as a half-opened lily.

'Well, how did it go?' she asked.

Mdlle Hortense had left the room to order her niece a drink of tilleul, which she considered necessary after the fatigue of the day. Glancing at Harriet, Jacqueline laughed.

'Have I not managed it well, your affair?'

Harriet gasped. 'What do you mean? How did you know?'

Here Mdlle Hortense returned, and Harriet fled to her own room. When she had gone, Jacqueline curled herself like a cat on the corner of the sofa. Already she had forgotten Harriet and the Professor, and gave herself up deliciously to thinking of the dark eyes of a student at the conservatoire – a penniless young man, son of the schoolmaster of Rolle. How splendid he had looked, rowing on the lake the day of the regatta, and how furious her parents and Tante Hortense would be!

But Harriet leaned out of her bedroom window and watched the red glow of evening on the Savoy Alps, where they showed behind the pointed roof of the German Protestant church.

The windows of the girls' school opposite were wide open; someone was playing Schumann's *Romance*, and playing it in a way of which Mdlle Hortense would certainly not have approved.

Down in the garden below, the purplish petals of the over-blown roses fell noiselessly to the ground.

The Dancers

BY ERIC LINKLATER

MR. G. P. POMFRET was a wealthy man and the centre of as large a circle of friends and relations as the junior partner in a prosperous brewery might reasonably expect to be. But, until he disappeared, he was not famous. Then he became a household word, and the five members of his family – consanguineous, allied, and presumptively allied – who disappeared with him, all earned pages in those indefatigable supplements to our national biography, the Sunday newspapers. For with Mr. Pomfret there also vanished Mrs. Pomfret his wife; Lieut.-Commander Hugo Disney and Mrs. Disney (*née* Pomfret); Miss Joan Pomfret and Mr. George Otto Samways, her fiancé.

The circumstances of their joint occultation were remarkable, and as the geographical environment was sufficiently and yet not immeasurably remote from the more advertised holiday haunts of man, the affair took to itself a halo of romance that was entirely different from the hectic nimbus which ever and again makes some obscure police-court luminous.

It has been said that Mr. Pomfret was wealthy. He had inherited a large number of shares in an excellent brewery and with them a sanguine and speculative temperament. His fortune persuaded the members of his family, initial and contributory, readily to accept a certain imperiousness of temper which Mr. Pomfret occasionally exhibited; and so when one evening early in June he said, from the top of his dinner-table, 'I intend, subject to your approval, to take you all with me on a somewhat unusual holiday,' his

household (including Lieut.-Commander Hugo Disney) and the solitary guest (Mr. George Otto Samways) accepted the invitation in the manner of a royal command.

'Where are we going, daddy?' asked Joan, adeptly disengaging the integument of her peach.

'To Orkney, my dear,' replied Mr. Pomfret, and surveyed with benign amusement the expressions of surprise which impinged upon or flitted across the faces of his domestic audience.

Lieut.-Commander Disney alone showed no amazement. 'That's excellent,' he said heartily. 'I've meant for long enough to go back there.'

Orkney is worthy of some attention. The islands have a romantic appeal as the home of lost races. The Vikings settled there, and before the Vikings there was a mysterious people, Picts or such, little men who vanished and left few traces of their occupation. At some time Culdee monks from Ireland went there; and went again as silently. Stewart earls ruled the islands like young pagan emperors. When the Great War began the British Fleet chose Scapa Flow, in the heart of the Orkneys, as its headquarters and battle haven. Later the German Fleet also rested there; but at the still bottom, not on the wind-flawed surface of the waters.

It was, however, the excellence of the trout-fishing which led Lieut.-Commander Disney to applaud Mr. Pomfret's decision. He had spent the less active intervals in three years of naval warfare in Scapa Flow, and had become acquainted with the opportunities of sport which the island lochs offered to a fisherman robust enough to disregard occasional inclemencies of weather. Frequently he had spoken to Mr. Pomfret of brown trout and sea trout, praising their strain of fishy pugnacity and the delicate savour of their flesh; praising too the lure of sunny waters under a canopy of brilliant sky all painted with cloud galleons, porpoises and swimming dolphins of cloud, and at evening gorgeous with the barred crimson and gold, the errant

greens, the daffodil hues, the rosy outflung feathers, of the sun sliding bedwards behind the enormous wall of the Atlantic. And these conversations, moving like yeast in Mr. Pomfret's brain, had finally given rise to this momentous decision.

It is unnecessary to consider the manner of the journey north, which was complicated. Mr. Pomfret had rented for two months a large house called Swandale, in one of the seaward parishes in the northern part of the Mainland of Orkney; it was considered advisable to take, as well as his family, a motor-car, a chauffeur and three maids. The first week or so of their residence passed pleasantly enough. They were enraptured with the scenery, the vast stretches of ever-changing sea, the majestic cliffs loud with the ceaseless activity of gulls; they watched the diving gannets, the ludicrous earnest puffins, the graceful terns, and hysterical oyster-catchers. They were delighted with the shy and independent islanders. They enjoyed the novelty of peat-fires blazing in an open hearth. Lieut.-Commander Disney and Mrs. Disney fished with notable success in the neighbouring lochs. Mr. Pomfret walked and inquired diligently into local traditions and history. And Mrs. Pomfret read the works of Lord Lytton, to which she was ineradicably addicted. Joan Pomfret and Otto Samways occupied themselves in ways apparently satisfactory, and certainly remote from the rest of the family.

The holiday would probably have continued on these pleasant and harmless lines had it not been for the imaginative temperament (excited by love and romantic surroundings) of Miss Joan Pomfret. It suddenly occurred to her that they were rapidly approaching Midsummer Day.

Now the summer solstice has, or had, its appropriate festivals. In the northern parts of Britain the sun used indisputably to reign supreme, and, at such times as his presence blessed the earth almost throughout the circle of day and night, it was proper to honour him with dancing and other devout festivities. In Orkney he succeeds at mid-

summer in banishing the thief of night for all but a dim hour or so from the dominion of his majesty. There is light on the islands, benign and irresistible, except for one or perhaps two shadowed hours in the cycle of twenty-four.

Something of this was in Joan's mind when she said over the marmalade one morning, 'Daddy, the day after tomorrow is midsummer. Let's celebrate it properly.'

'How, my dear?' asked Mr. Pomfret, putting down the toast which was within an inch of his mouth.

'By a midnight picnic. We'll spend the night on an island—on Eynhallow—and see the dawn come up before the after-glow is out of the sky. And we'll dance when the sun shows himself again.'

'I haven't danced for years,' said Mrs. Pomfret pathetically, 'and don't you think the grass would be damp?'

'Tut!' said Mr. Pomfret. 'Grass damp? Pouf!' Spousal resistance invariably excited him to action, and he had, it may be remembered, a sanguine nature.

'I should like a chance to watch the birds on Eynhallow,' said Lieut.-Commander Disney. 'They're interesting in the early morning. And we could take plenty of rugs, and a flask, you know, in case it is cold.'

'Of course we could.' Mr. Pomfret was in a singularly eupeptic mood that morning. He felt positively boyish. 'Do you remember, Mother'—he called Mrs. Pomfret Mother when he felt particularly young and could think good-naturedly of her growing a little mature—'Do you remember that bicycling tour I did once in Cornwall? Excellent fun it was, Hugo. It must be twenty-five years ago, and I often wish that I had found an opportunity to repeat it. This idea of yours is splendid, Joan, my dear. Dancing to the Midnight Sun—Ha! I shall show you all how to dance. Hugo, my boy, will you see about a boat?'

Eynhallow is a small uninhabited island between the Mainland of Orkney and the island of Rousay. It is surrounded by unruly tides, but to the fishermen who know

them it is not difficult to land, provided the weather is calm. Those definitely in favour of the expedition were Mr. Pomfret, Lieut.-Commander Disney, Joan, and, naturally, since Joan would be there, Otto Samways. Mrs. Disney shrugged her shoulders and said, 'It will mean the first late night I've had for a fortnight and the first woollen undies I've worn for years. I don't mind, though.' Poor Mrs. Pomfret sighed and returned to *The Last Days of Pompeii*.

Hugo Disney persuaded a local fisherman, John Corrigan, that it would be more profitable than lobster-fishing to sail the Pomfret party to Eynhallow and call for them on the following morning, and so the preliminaries of the excursion were successfully completed. John Corrigan was privately convinced that they were all mad – except Mrs. Pomfret, whom he found to be an unwilling victim – but refrained from saying so, except in the privacy of his own family; for a madman's money is as good as that of a man dogmatically and indecently sane, and indeed, more easily earned.

On Midsummer Eve then, after dinner, the Pomfrets set sail. They carried baskets of food, for a night in the open is a potent ally of hunger, but no instrument of fire, such as a Primus stove, for that, Joan said, would be an insult to the omnipotence of the sun, who should rule alone. They took rugs and cushions, and Mrs. Pomfret wore a fur coat and Russian boots. They set a portable gramophone – for they were to dance – in the stern of the boat, and Otto Samways carried two albums of records. There was a heavy cargo aboard when John Corrigan hauled his sheet and brought the boat's head round for Eynhallow. He landed them, without more incident than a faint protest from Mrs. Pomfret, on a shingle beach, and left them.

And that is the last that has been seen of them.

When Corrigan returned to Eynhallow in the morning, he found the island deserted. He shouted, and there was no answer, he walked round the island, which is small, and found no trace of the midnight visitors. He sat on a

rock and struggled heavily with thought, and then, because he was anxious to get back before the tide turned, he sailed home again.

It is, of course, an ingrained belief in the mind of the northern Scot that the English are a flighty, unreliable race. They travel far from home when there is no need to travel, they are wantonly extravagant (John Corrigan had been paid in advance), and their actions spring from impulse instead of emanating slowly from cautious deliberation. They are volatile (as the English say the French are volatile), and their volatility makes them difficult to understand. So John Corrigan said nothing, except to his wife, of the disappearance of the Pomfrets. He had no intention of making a fool of himself by raising what was possibly a false alarm, and the whole day, which might have been profitably spent on investigation, was wasted.

In the evening the chauffeur, an energetic man when aroused, went to make inquiries, and was astounded to hear that his master had apparently vanished. With the decision of a man who had lived in cities and learnt, before he took to driving one, the art of evading motor-cars, he told a little girl who happened to be at hand to summon the village constable, and ordered Corrigan to make his boat ready for sea. The latter protested, for the wind and tide were at odds and a pretty sea was breaking round Eynhallow. But the chauffeur was like adamant, and drove the constable and John Corrigan to the shore, helped to push out the boat, and after a stormy crossing landed, wet through, on the island. A thorough search was made, and not a sign of the Pomfrets could be found; nothing, that is, except a little tag of bright metal which was found lying on the grass, the significance of which was unknown to Corrigan and the policeman, who had no experience of modern toilets, and to the chauffeur, who was virtuous and unmarried. Later it was identified simultaneously by the maids as the end, the catch or hatch as it were, of a stocking-suspender such as many ladies wear. If Miss Joan had been dancing

1
vigorously, it might have sprung asunder from the rest of the article and fallen to the ground, they said.

The three maids became hysterical soon after they learnt of the mystery; John Corrigan went home to his bed, convinced that it did not concern him; the constable was useless, having encountered no such case in his previous professional experience; and it was left to the chauffeur to devise a course of action.

He persuaded the constable to cycle to Kirkwall, the capital and cathedral city of Orkney and report to such superior officers as he might discover there. He insisted on the local telegraph office opening after hours, and sent an expensive message to the newspaper which guided the thought and chronicled the deeds of the town in which Mr. Pomfret had prominently lived. And he made a careful inventory of everything that the unfortunate party had taken with them. Then he sat down to compose a long letter to the newspaper already mentioned.

The assistant-editor of the paper made instant and magnificent use of the chauffeur's telegram. Times were dull, and his chief was away on holiday. The chief sub-editor was a man of consummate craft and no conscience. Between them they splashed a throbbing, breath-taking story over the two main news columns. They flung across the page a streaming headline that challenged the hearts of their readers like a lonely bugle sounding on a frosty night. Eynhallow became a Treasure Island encircled by northern mists, and the sober citizens who read this strange story of the disappearance of people whom they knew so well (by sight), whose motor-cars they had envied, and whose abilities they had derided, felt creeping into their souls an Arctic fog of doubt, a cold hush of suspense, a breath of icy wind from the waste seas of mystery. Which was precisely the effect intended by the enterprising assistant editor and the highly competent sub-editor.

This was the beginning of the story which subsequently took all England by the ears, and echoed, thinly or tumultu-

ously, in ribald, hushed, or strident accents, in railway carriages and on the tops of buses, at street-corners and over dinner-tables, at chamber-concerts and through brass-band recitals, in all places where two or three newspaper readers were gathered together, and finally in one or two topically inclined pulpits and behind the footlights of the variety stage.

The assistant-editor sent hurrying northwards a young and alert reporter and it was not his fault that an emissary of a great London evening paper arrived in Orkney before him. For the latter travelled by aeroplane, the evening paper being wealthy and its editor having been noticeably impressed by the provincial report. The first general information, therefore, that Britain had of the Great Pomfret Mystery was a brightly written account of the long flight of Our Special Investigator.

Within twenty-four hours every self-respecting news-sheet in the country had published a map of Orkney, on which the approximate position of Eynhallow was surrounded by a black circle. The more erudite contributed brief historical sketches of the islands, and a few discovered that a church or monastery had once been built on the particular islet of mystery. Brief descriptions of Mr. Pomfret with at least the names, Christian names, and ages of his party appeared in all the papers. Two offered ready-made solutions to the problem, three laughed at it, and one rashly cited as a parallel case the vanishing crew of the *Marie Celeste*.

On the following day a Paymaster-Commander wrote to say that he had once, during the War, motored from Scapa to Swandale (Mr. Pomfret's house), and distinctly remembered seeing Eynhallow. 'A charming, sea-girt, romantic-looking island,' he wrote, 'with the appearance of having withstood a thousand storms and blossomed with a thousand green springtimes.' Subsequently an Admiral, who had also been in Scapa during the War, corroborated this, writing to say that he had seen the island himself. Thereafter its actual existence was not doubted.

had never gone there. But the circumstantial evidence of the servants was in Corrigan's favour, and he had not, it was found, the mental ability successfully to dispose of six adult bodies.

Investigation of a practical kind came to an end. There was no one to question and nothing to find. Even the spiritualistic mediums who offered their services were of no real assistance, though some of them claimed to have established communication with Miss Joan Pomfret, who told them that everything was for the best in the best of all possible Beyonds. Mrs. Pomfret, it was reported, had said, 'Sometimes it is light here and sometimes it is dark. I have not seen Bulmer, but I am happy.' There was a little discussion on the significance of *Bulmer*, till a personal friend suggested that it was a mis-tapping for the name of Mrs. Pomfret's favourite author, but the general mystery was in danger of being forgotten, dismissed as insoluble.

It was about this time that Mr. Harold Pinto left Kirkwall in the Orkneys for Leith, sailing on the S.S. *St. Giles*. Mr. Pinto was a commercial traveller, more silent than many of his class, a student of human nature, and in his way an amateur of life.

When the *St. Giles* was some four hours out of Kirkwall he stepped into the small deckhouse which served as a smoking-room, and, pressing a bell, presently ordered a bottle of beer. There were, in the smoking-room, two other commercial travellers with whom he was slightly acquainted, the reporter of the provincial newspaper which had first heard of the Pomfret case, an elderly farmer who said he was going to South Africa, and a young, bright-eyed man, carelessly dressed, distinguished by a short, stubby beard. He looked, thought Mr. Pinto, as though he might be a gentleman. His nails were clean; but his soft collar was disgustingly dirty and his clothes had evidently been slept in. He asked for Bass, at the same time as Mr. Pinto, in an educated and pleasant voice, but when the beer came he merely tasted it, and an expression of disgust passed over

his face. He took no part in the general conversation, though Mr. Pinto noticed that he followed the talk actively with his eyes – very expressive eyes they were, full, at times, of an almost impish merriment.

The conversation naturally centred round the Pomfret Mystery, and the reporter very graphically told the story from the beginning, embellished with certain details which had not been published. 'There are some things,' he said, 'which I wouldn't willingly tell outside this company. It's my private belief that old Pomfret took drugs. Don't ask me for proof, because I'm not going to tell you. And there's another thing. Joan Pomfret once asked the gardener at Swandale – he's a local man – whether he knew of any really lonely places near by. The sort of places where there were likely to be no casual passers-by. I didn't send that piece of news to my paper because I'm still waiting for the psychological moment at which to make it public. But you'll admit that it's significant.'

The other commercial travellers both contributed theories, at which the reporter scoffed, but Mr. Pinto was almost as silent as the young man with the beard.

'Mass suicide won't do,' said the reporter, 'however much you talk about crowd psychology; and mass murder, followed by suicide of the murderer, won't do either. None of them was likely to run amok. And where are the bodies? One at least would have been washed up before now. No, it's my opinion that there's an international gang at the bottom of it, and one of the party – at least one – was either a confederate or a fugitive from the justice of the gang.'

The man who was going to South Africa said that he had a cousin who had once disappeared in Mashonaland. He was about to tell the story more fully when the two commercial travellers and the reporter discovered that they were sleepy – it was nearly midnight – and went hurriedly below. And after a minute or two the man with the cousin in Mashonaland followed them.

The young man with the stubby beard sat still, staring at

nothing with eyes that were alert and full of comprehension. He seemed to be listening to the throb of the steamer's screw and the answering wash of the sea. His lips moved slightly when a wave, louder than the others, ran with a slithering caress along the ship's side, and he smiled engagingly, looking at Mr. Pinto as though he expected an answering smile.

'The Möder Di,'¹ he said, 'laughing at fisherman's wives. All summer she laughs lightly, but the laughter of her winter rut is like icebergs breaking.'

Mr. Pinto, remarking that it seemed to be a fine night, stepped out on to the deck.

'Oh, a glorious night,' said the young man with the beard, following him. 'Look at the clouds, like grey foxes running from the moon!'

'Indeed, there is one extraordinarily like a fox,' replied Mr. Pinto politely.

'She is hunting to-night,' said the young man. 'Foxes and grey wolves. And see, there's a stag in the west. A great night for hunting, and all the sky to run through.'

Mr. Pinto and his friend had the deck to themselves, and Mr. Pinto began to feel curiously lonely in such strange company.

'Listen,' said the young man, pointing over the rail. 'Do you hear a shoal of herring talking out there? There's a hum of fear in the air. Perhaps a thresher-shark is coming through the Firth.'

Mr. Pinto, convinced that he had a lunatic to deal with, was considering an excuse for going below when the young man said: 'I saw you sitting silent while those fools were talking about Pomfret's disappearance. Why did you say nothing?'

'Because I didn't think any of their theories were good enough,' answered Mr. Pinto, feeling a little easier, 'and because I had no theory of my own to offer.'

'What do you think? You must think something?'

¹ The Ninth Wave.

Mr. Pinto blinked once or twice, and then diffidently suggested, "There are more things in heaven and earth," you know; it sounds foolish, after having been quoted so often and so unnecessarily, but -

'It does not sound foolish. Those others were fools. You, it seems, are not yet a fool; though you will be, if you live to grow old and yet not old enough. If you like, I will tell you what happened to George Pomfret and his friends. Sit there.'

Mr. Pinto, rather subdued, sat; and the young man walked once or twice up and down, his hair flying like a black banner in the wind, turned his face up to the moon to laugh loudly and melodiously, and suddenly said: 'They landed on Eynhallow in the quietness of a perfect evening. The tide was talking to the shore, telling it the story of the Seven Seals who went to Sule Skerry, but they could not hear it then. A redshank whistled "O Joy! look at them!" as they stepped ashore. But they did not know that either. They made a lot of noise as they walked up the shingle beach and the rabbits in the grass, because they made a noise, were not frightened, but only ran a little way and turned to look at them.

'Mrs. Pomfret was not happy, but they let her sit on the rugs and she fell asleep. The others walked round the island - it is not big - and threw stones into the sea. The sea chuckled and threw more stones on to the beach; but they did not know that. And the sea woke birds who were roosting there, and the birds flew round and laughed at them. By and by the shadow of night came - it was not really night - and they sat down to eat. They ate for a long time, and woke Mrs. Pomfret, who said she could never eat out of doors, and so they let her sleep again. The others talked. They were happy, in a way, but what they talked was nonsense. Even Joan, who was in love, talked nonsense which she does not like to think about now.'

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"Then -" Mr. Pinto excitedly tried to interrupt, but the young man went imperturbably on.

'Disney said one or two things about the birds which were true, but they did not listen to him. And by and by – the hours pass quickly on Midsummer Night – it was time to dance. They had taken a gramophone with them, and Joan had found a wide circle of turf, as round as a penny and heavenly smooth, with a square rock beside it. They put the gramophone on the rock and played a fox-trot or some dance like that. Disney and Norah Disney danced together, and Joan danced with Samways. Two or three times they danced, and old Pomfret made jokes and put new records on.

'And then Joan said, "These aren't proper dances for Eynhallow and Midsummer Eve. I hate them." And she stopped the gramophone. She picked up the second album of records and looked for what she wanted; it was light enough to read the names if she held them close to her eyes. She soon found those she was looking for.'

The young man looked doubtfully at Mr. Pinto and asked, 'Do you know the music of Grieg?'

'A little of it,' said Mr. Pinto. 'He composed some Norwegian dances. One of them goes like this.' And he whistled a bar or two, tunelessly enough.

The young man snapped his fingers joyously and stepped lightly with adept feet on the swaying deck.

'That is it,' he cried, and sang some strange-sounding words to the tune. 'But Grieg did not make it. He heard it between a pine-forest and the sea and cleverly wrote it down. But it was made hundreds of years ago, when all the earth went dancing, except the trees, and their roots took hold of great rocks and twined round the rocks so that they might not join the dance as they wished. For it was forbidden them, since they had to grow straight and tall that ships might be made out of them.'

The young man checked himself. 'I was telling you about the Pomfrets,' he said.

'Joan found these dances that she loved, and played first one and then the other. She made them all dance to the

music, though they did not know what steps were in it, nor in what patterns they should move. But the tunes took them by the heels and they pranced and bowed and jumped, laughing all the time. Old Pomfret capered in the middle, kicking his legs, and twirling round like a top. And he laughed; how he laughed! And when he had done shaking with laughter he would start to dance again.

“This is too good for Mother to miss,” he said, “we must wake her and make her dance too.” So they woke Mrs. Pomfret, and there being then six of them they made some kind of a figure and started to dance in earnest. Mrs. Pomfret, once she began, moved as lightly as any of them except Joan, who was like thistledown on the grass and moonlight on the edge of a cloud.

‘And then, as the music went on, they found that they were dancing in the proper patterns, for they had partners who had come from nowhere, who led them first to the right and then to the left, up the middle and down the sides, bowing, and knocking their heels in the air. As the tune quickened they turned sometimes head over heels, even Mrs. Pomfret, who held her sides and laughed to see old Pomfret twirling on one toe. And the gramophone never stopped, for a little brown man was sitting by it and now and again turning the handle, and singing loudly as he sat.

‘So they danced while the sky became lighter and turned from grey to a shining colour like mackerel; and then little clouds like roses were thrown over the silver, and at last the sun himself, daffodil gold, all bright and new, shot up and sent the other colours packing.

‘And everybody shouted and cheered like mad, and for a minute danced more wildly than ever, turning catherine-wheels, fast and faster in a circle, or shouting “Hey!” and “Ho!” and “Ahoi! Ahoi! Ahoi!”

‘Then they sank to the ground exhausted, and the Pomfrets looked at their partners who had come from nowhere; and were suddenly amazed.

“Well, I’m damned!” said old Pomfret, and all the little

brown men rolled on the grass and laughed as though they would burst.

“Oh, they’re the Wee Folk, the Peerie ¹ Men!” cried Joan, delightedly, clapping her hands. “Peerie Men, Peerie Men, I’ve found you at last!”

‘And again the little men laughed and hugged themselves on the grass. By and by, still laughing, they drew together and talked among themselves very earnestly, and then the biggest of them, who was as tall as a man’s leg to the mid-thigh, went forward, saying his name was Ferriostok, and made a little speech explaining how delighted they were to entertain such charming guests on Eynhallow; and would they please to come in for breakfast?’

‘Some pushed aside the stone on which the gramophone had been standing and, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, the Pomfrets went down rock stairs to a long, sandy hall, lit greenly by the sea, and full, at that time, of the morning song of the North Tide of Eynhallow. They sat down, talking with their hosts, and then two very old little men brought stone cups full of a yellow liquor that smelt like honey and the first wind after frost. They tasted it, curiously, and old Pomfret – he was a brewer, you know – went red all over and said loudly, ‘I’ll give every penny I have in the world for the recipe!’ For he guessed what it was.

‘And the little men laughed louder than ever, and filled his cup again. One said, “The Great King offered us Almain for it eleven hundred years ago. We gave him one cup for love, and no more. But you, who have brought that music with you, are free to our cellar. Stay and drink with us, and to-night we shall dance again.”

‘No one of them had any thought of going, for it was heather ale they drank. Heather ale! And the last man who tasted it was Thomas of Ercildoune. It was for heather ale that the Romans came to Britain, having heard of it in Gaul, and they pushed northward to Mount Graupius in

¹ Little.

search of the secret. But they never found it. And now old Pomfret was swilling it, his cheeks like rubies, because Joan had brought back to the Peerie Men the music they had lost six hundred years before, when their oldest minstrel died of a mad otter's bite.

'Disney was talking to an old grey seal at the sea-door, hearing new tales of the German war, and Joan was listening to the Reykjavik story of the Solan Geese which three little men told her all together, so excited they were by her beauty and by the music she had brought them. At night they danced again, and Joan learnt the Weaving of the Red Ware, the dance that the red shore-seaweed makes for full-moon tides. The Peerie Men played on fiddles cut out of old tree-roots, with strings of rabbit-gut, and they had drums made of shells and rabbit-skins scraped as thin as tissues with stone knives. They hunt quietly, and that is why the rabbits are frightened of silence, but were not afraid of the Pomfrets, who made a noise when they walked. The Peerie Men's music was thin and tinkley, though the tunes were as strong and sweet as the heather ale itself, and always they turned again to the gramophone which Joan had brought, and danced as madly as peewits in April, leaping like winter spray, and clapping their heels high in the air. They danced the Merry Men of Mey and the slow sad Dance of Lofoden, so that everybody wept a little. And then they drank more ale and laughed again, and as the sun came up they danced the Herring Dance, weaving through and through so fast that the eye could not follow them.

'Now this was the third sunrise since the Pomfrets had gone to the island, for the first day and the second night and the second day had passed like one morning in the sandy hall of the Little Men; so many things were there to hear, and such good jokes an old crab made, and so shockingly attractive was a mermaid story that the afternoon tide told. Even the sand had a story, but it was so old that the Peerie Men themselves could not understand it, for it

began in darkness and finished under a green haze of ice, and since the Pomfrets were so busy there they heard no sound of the chauffeur's visit and the Peerie Men said nothing of it. They had taken below all the rugs and cushions and hampers and gramophone records, and brushed the grass straight, so that no trace was left of the Midsummer dancing - except the tag of Joan's stocking-suspender, which was overlooked, so it seems.

'The old grey seal told them, in the days that followed, of all that was going on by land, and even Mrs. Pomfret laughed to hear of the bustle and stir they had created. There was no need, the Peerie Men found, to make them hide when more searchers came, for none of the Pomfrets had any wish to be found. Disney said he was learning something about the sea for the first time in his life (and he had followed the sea all his life), and Norah sang Iceland cradle-songs all day. Old Pomfret swilled his ale, glowing like a ruby in the green cave, and Joan - Joan was the queen of the Peerie Men, and the fosterling of the old grumbling sand, and the friend of every fish that passed by the sea-door. And at night they danced to the music of tree-root fiddles and pink shell-drums, and above all to the music which you think was made by Grieg. They danced, I tell you! . . .'

The young man tossed up his arms and touched his fingers above his head; he placed the flat of his foot on the calf of the other leg; twirled rapidly on his toes. 'Danced, I say! Is there anything in the world but dancing?' And he clapped his heels together, high in the air, first to one side then to the other, singing something fast and rhythmic and melodious.

Mr. Pinto coughed nervously - he was feeling cold - and said: 'That is an extraordinarily interesting story. But if you will pardon my curiosity, do you mind telling me what reason you have for thinking that this actually happened to Mr. Pomfret and his friends?'

'Reason!' said the young man, staring at him. His

hair blew out on the wind like a black banner, and he laughed loud and melodiously.

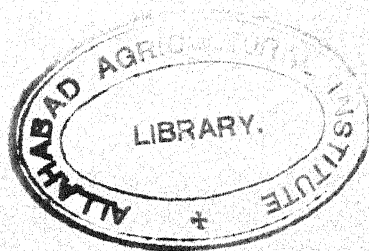
'This reason,' he said, 'that I am Otto Samways!' And he turned, very neatly, a standing somersault on the deck and came up laughing.

'They sent me away to buy something,' he said, 'and when I have bought it I am going back to Eynhallow to dance the Merry Men, and the Herring Dance, and the Sea Moon's Dance with Joan.'

And once again he sang, very melodiously, and turned a rapid series of catherine-wheels along the deck.

'To buy what?' shouted Mr. Pinto, as he disappeared.

'Gramophone needles!' bellowed the young man, laughing uproariously.



*Lonely Camp*¹

An Irish Incident

BY H. A. MANHOOD

AT different seasons Rich and the Novice, in search of fishing-ground, had crossed many bogs and moors, but never one so large and wildly broken and fascinating as this isle of loneliness within easy cry of the five ragged saints of Aran. Empty of all human contrivance as it seemed, its naked immensity was almost frightening: come to awareness of its vastness the mind leapt from the body in hasty curiosity as if recognizing the place, roving wide in the hope of finding companion essences known before birth. It seemed unfinished, a romping-ground for mastodons which had by some strange chance escaped civilization and the intention of its Creator, and was slowly disintegrating like a leaf in winter. The car appeared to feel this too; for the engine, for no discoverable reason, suddenly choked and stopped at a point where, we gloomily thought, only wings could succour us, as if it, too, wished to revel out of time. Far from admitting its right to stop we probed and pondered, but all without effect, turning at last to refresh ourselves through the eye when anger threatened. The prospect, after a second glance, brought a strange peace of mind. Leaning together over the bonnet we ceased to fume over foolish mechanical details, pointing out curious features of the landscape. Time did not matter after all in a place untouched by Time.

The road, well made but little used, curved away from us like the centre vein of a mouldering leaf, now brinking high

¹ From *Apples by Night*, by H. A. Manhood, by permission of Messrs. Jonathan Cape, Ltd.

above one of the many lakes, now low through reefs of tumbled moorstones that were like great hounds quarrelling over a giant backbone. Lakes were on every side, some large, some small, all connected by ropy streams and rock trickles, and broken by the west wind, so that it seemed as if the silver leaves of a magic crop were flapping rhythmically in sunken acres. Bracken and cotton-grass fringed them all, flooding in green white-flecked waves to the road. Distant hills looked like brown gipsy tents; the clouds beyond the smoke of companionable fires. Not even a sheep was to be seen. The quietness was outside our knowledge, the wind only sounding at times like dancing silk as it brushed against leaf and rock and quick-laughing water.

Agreed upon the inappropriateness of all words we left the car, descending twenty yards to the verge of a splendid bean-shaped lake, Rich absently polishing the bowl of his pipe upon his lapel, gazing keenly across the water for signs of breaking fish, presently raking among stones for stranded flies upon which to base his choice of the artificial. 'I wonder,' was all he said, as he went to unstrap a rod and rummage among tackle-bags.

Ten minutes later he was stationed behind a jutting rock, magically clearing his backcast as it seemed to the recumbent Novice, his line looping and whistling in pleasant anticipation. Water rippled with a hint of music as if it lapped over the keys of a sunken harpsichord, telling of past journeys over the world, two wrens hopping from point to point like earnest interlocutors, undisturbed by our presence. The three flies were drawn delicately. The sun appeared and vanished in cloud, shone and vanished again as if someone were fishing for us with a glowing bait. Rich grumbled a little, and paused to change a fly. Lightly he stepped to a convenient rock and cast again. At once there was a splash, a strike, and the winch seemed to sneeze. Rich chuckled softly, playing the trout like an angel, singing merrily in sheer delight, his ragged coat flapping in the wind as if it were imitating the dance of his soul. Hastily the Novice stumbled

over rock and thorn and found the net, returning with all speed to the danger of his limbs. But there was no hurry. It was a matter of honour with Rich never to fumble his fish. There was a moment when they could be led easily into the net, and for that moment he always worked and waited. The trout leapt once with a last magnificent effort, wheeling deep and lunging twice before submitting to the inshore drag of the line. 'A beauty, begob!' The Novice, anxious that so fine a specimen should not be lost, uttered hasty advice and made play with the net, all of which Rich ignored. In his own time he reeled in and reached for the net. 'Thanks.' A snout appeared above water, was netted unresistingly, and the lifted fish was seen to be a brilliant fellow of perhaps a pound and a half, with small head and fat well-shaped body, an unusually fine fish for moorland water. The Novice was jubilant; the problem of lunch – always an important one in his somewhat fidgety mind – was settled. 'Well done!' He hopped about while Rich weighed the fish, echoing the figure with enthusiastic emphasis, 'Twenty-seven ounces!'

As if the catching of such a fish had excited him not at all, Rich stooped and rinsed his hands, drying them in his armpits, gazing thoughtfully at a shrimp of cloud sailing overhead as if he contemplated using it for bait. 'It seems a good place to camp,' he said. 'Plenty of water and kindling.'

'A bit bleak,' the Novice ventured, imagining midnight in such surroundings.

'Bleak! with fish like that at your front door?'

'We can't build a house of fish. . . .'

'House? What would you be doing with a house? Isn't it fishing we shall be all the time?'

'Even if it rains?'

'Of course, for isn't that the best time of all! Come now, stop biting your nails and be reasonable. If it's a house you want, isn't there the wreck of one over there for you to roost in? In any case, the car won't go. If you can manage to put it right, we'll move on a mile or so.' And Rich turned again to the lake, well knowing the Novice's utter ignorance of all

things mechanical, and deeming it good for his soul to experience discomfort from time to time.

Disgruntled, the Novice sniffed and muttered mutinously, unsheathing a knife with which to clean the trout. He lifted the fish to a flat stone, but did not at once use the knife, gazing instead at the vivid reddish-brown markings and marigold-yellow belly. A beauty and withal a good fighter. It was worth while having one that size on the end of your line, even worth a little discomfort. Two days had passed since he had felt the pull of a good fish. Three times running, on nearing a particular spot where shallows gleamed yellowly, called Burke's Drift, off Innisdoorus, on Corrib, he had hooked and landed a three-pound fish. He had tried to be casual about the luck, but Rich had seen through his pretence of nonchalance: 'Let yourself go, man! There's many would be giving the very hair of their heads to be playing fish like that!' And the Novice had let himself go, swearing joyously whenever the fish leapt or dived. Tug, tug at the line, the husky laughter of the reel . . . Lord, that was the life! 'Come on, my beauty, show your paces for the last time!' Three of them in less than an hour! Great fishing! This place promised as well. Regretfully the Novice severed the head of the trout before him, squeezing out the vein of clotted blood against the backbone with his thumbnail, washing it scrupulously, hailing Rich before returning to the car.

'Don't catch them all! I'll fix camp and give you a call when grub is ready.'

'Damn the camp! Come and fish while they are taking!'

'Presently.' Wilfully the Novice made reply, aware that he will not be happy until his house is in order. But Rich was already into a second fish and had forgotten him. Wrapping the trout in fern until he should be ready for it, the Novice climbed to the road, looking towards the wrecked cottage indicated by Rich in the hope of a level tent square.

The cottage stood among craggy rocks on a slope and was hardly distinguishable at first glance from the rocks themselves. Exploration revealed an overgrown path leading up-

wards from road to ruin. The path had been wide and well-trodden in its time, but now seemed ashamed and reluctant in its course. Rocks had fallen in the way, and brambles were cross-linked and menacing as barbed wire. Squeezing spines from his hands, the Novice emerged into a square and miraculously level plat, comfortably grassed and drained, overlooking the road and backed by the ruin. Evidently it had once formed the potato patch of the owner. A shabby black chicken was scratching methodically from tuft to tuft, its feathers absurdly rumped in the wind eddying about the cottage so that it seemed to be struggling to escape the stranglehold of a monstrous worm. Perceiving the Novice it stood motionless, winking rapidly, turning with jerky precision and vanishing into the cottage as if to inform some hidden tenant. Perched upon the shredded thatch were two grey crows sheltering behind the stumpy stone chimney. Not until the chicken had disappeared did they nod to each other and whirl upwards like flakes of ash blown from the blackened funnel which appeared to contain their nest.

The Novice, alone again, grateful for the tent square, stood and gazed sympathetically at the ruin, wondering at its history, how it had come to such miserable end. Buttoned and tenanted it would have been a snug and cheerful place, but now, with broken-hinged door, splintered windows, sunken thatch and crumbling walls, only sadness emanated from it. In shape, with bowed and shaggy roof and earlike chimney, it resembled a kneeling ass. But the soul was gone. In a corner, stitched over with bents and nettles, was a great pile of broken crocks and bottles gleaming like a city of the plains, the home of a grass snake and an enormous frog who seemed entirely unafraid of piercing his fatness upon one of the many shining splinters. Beyond, under a trembling roof, were several barrels, splayed by the falling of hoops and looking like huge blackened sunflowers.

Entering the cottage, alert for falling stones and timbers, the Novice stared thoughtfully, breathing a homely sooty smell, disturbing mice engaged among sticks and paper in

the hearth, these causing a crackling and rustling that was like the first breath of fire. Funguses were sprouting from chinks in the walls and from the floor, once beaten flat but now cracked and mole-tossed. Chalked upon a flat chimney-stone were many hardly decipherable strokes as of a primitive tally, and in a cranny the lump of chalk with which they had been scored still rested in a purse of cobweb. More shards were in a corner, deliberately broken it seemed as if in curiosity by some reedy-brained animal, deceived by false reflections. A high chair, curiously solid but now falling apart at the joints, stood under the window, and upon the sill was an oval mirror looking like a bright petal, together with a cracked shaving mug, 'A Present from Dublin,' a piece of soapstone and a broken-toothed comb in which a tangle of grey hair yet remained. What had become of the old fellow who had used them all?

The Novice shrugged and shivered a little, and went out into the sunshine, carefully wedging the broken door behind him. You could not be sure what might creep out of such a place after dark. A piece of chocolate, eaten with raisins, dispelled his gloom, and he began to whistle as he presently trod a place for the tent and built a fireplace of convenient stones. Looking down across the road before returning to the car he saw Rich tight in a fish; a good fish it must be, judging by the bend of the rod and Rich's audible delight. If all the other lakes were as productive! Solemnly the Novice counted all those in sight, large and small, numbering twenty-seven. An excellent camp for a fisherman, but lonely, begob! lonely enough. What must it be like in winter with the lakes brimming one into the other and no comfort anywhere? The Novice cursed his sensibility and tried to fix his thoughts upon the trout he would presently catch to keep him company, hurrying about his preparations.

Brambles cleared and tent erected, and a fire burning with cheerful hiss and crackle, the Novice was forced to admit a certain snugness. The plat was sheltered from the north, and the view was ideal. Nothing to bar the sun the whole day

long. Should it chance to storm, the tent could very well be stretched *inside* the cottage. The Novice felt almost happy. Water must be brought from the lake, but, to balance this disadvantage, turf and kindling in great quantity were to hand. The flesh of the trout was salmon-pink, and the smell of its frying charmed the rusty black hermit-fowl from its secret niche. Affecting disinterest it spuddled busily in the trodden grass, winking shrewdly, ever drawing nearer by a tail-first method. The Novice offered an old crust in all sincerity, but the hen only clucked in derision and flapped her miserable wings, looking like an old dame shaking her dress into a new primness after insult. 'To the devil with you, then, to be refusing an honest gift!' And the Novice hurled the crust, striking the bird fairly. With a shrill squawk it hopped two feet into the air, but not in panic, for it descended squarely, snatched the bread and scuttled into cover with long, wiry strides.

Laughing, the Novice called Rich to the meal, his shout flapping across the waste like a dove from the ark. Rich, intent upon yet another fish, responded shortly. The fish landed to his satisfaction, good-humour returned, and he mounted to the road with sprightly step, finding the path to the camp, holding his fish-weighted net high above the tangled undergrowth. The Novice snatched the pan from under his pilfering fingers just in time, pretending indignation.

'Is that the action of a gentleman? Kindly wait until everyone is seated!'

For answer Rich flipped a magnificent trout across. 'Ransom for a meal,' he pleaded, and, while the Novice stooped to admire, he fell upon the pan, briskly dividing the fish, slicing bread in a twinkling, eating like one awakened from hibernation. 'Good fish,' he mumbled.

'Then you must be going by appearances alone, for you're not giving yourself time to taste it! You remind me of a pigeon bolting acorns!'

'And thee reminds me of an angel in torment or an old

woman whose cow has run dry, or, again, of a mouldy chapman who cannot sell his tracts and who sings out of spite to the accompaniment of his own rattling teeth, howling like a wolf in the wilderness because his grapes are frost-bitten.

...

The Novice, well acquainted with the endlessness of Rich's invention, cried mournfully, '*Peccavi!*' and Rich grinned over a loaded fork: '*Peccavi* it is, and now sit ye down and eat, for time runs and the fishing is good. Seven pounds of trout in an hour. At this pace we shall have plenty to salt down against a time of famine. A good camp, commissar! Rum-looking ruin that, and the chicken, is it on the staff? What do you call it?'

'Daisy Jane is her name,' the Novice retorted. A pointed introduction followed, and then peace was declared. We ate and rejoiced. Trout was followed by rice boiled in milk and treacle to a kind of pudding. Some precious lettuce leaves were shared (lettuces are as rare as pickled oranges among the peasant Irish), and eaten with almond-firm cheese of cottage make. Rich offered the caraway seeds picked from his bread (one Irish hostess insists upon baking quantities of amply-seeded bread for us when we travel, much to Rich's disgust, for he numbers caraway seeds with midges among the worst accidents of nature) to Daisy Jane, but, after carrying one away for close inspection, she rejected it, blinking and cackling her disgust, mooching away to peck and scratch over an ancient dunghill. First hunger satisfied, Rich questioned her presence. 'Sensible bird, that. Odd that she should have been left behind. A peasant usually knows his fowls better than his beads. They must have left in a hurry . . .'

And Rich remembered other cottages blackened and open to the wind and the rain. 'And only a fowl remains in constant mourning,' he mused, and, compassionately, he flung an abundance of bread to Daisy Jane - the Novice's bread. The Novice uttered a remonstrance, Daisy Jane bolted with the bread held securely in her tarnished beak, and Rich munched complacently at an apple. 'Hush,' he said, 'else

'tis few fish we shall be catching this afternoon with your bull-voice warning them all. . . .'

'Snooks!' retorted the Novice crisply, and stretched himself to sleep. The fish might wait until body and mind were in agreement. Pleasant to feel the sun soaking through the body, ripening it, like an apple born intolerably sour but waking to a mellow sweetness. Apples jumping over a stile, twenty, thirty, forty . . . Daisy Jane was the shepherd. For counting beads she used a string of caraway seeds.

★

Hours later the Novice awoke to a violent blow upon the temple. A first thought was that an enormous wasp had driven its sting home with a hammer. He sat up, striking blindly, eyes white with the sun. A triumphant squawk proved the culprit. Daisy Jane had snapped a fly from his dreaming brow. Confound her! And yet, after all, her intentions might have been good. Was it better to be pecked than stung?

The Novice lay for a while in calm enjoyment of the sky. The sun was at half-mast, and as yet he had caught no fish. Why bother? Guiltily he remembered the terms of his novitiate and moved reluctantly to his feet. The prospect of casting a fly for several hours did not thrill him. Yet it would be pleasant to feel a taut line again, to land a mettlesome fish. Lazily he straightened camp – a longish job, for tidiness is his weakness – turning over the problem in his mind. Worm-fishing was the ideal, but it must be done without Rich's knowledge, for in his eyes it was an unpardonable sin to fish so clumsily when flies could be used. With a very pleasant sense of wrong-doing the Novice dibbed for worms in the ancient dunghill, securing a score or more of rank and rosy-banded brandlings. Happily he filled a tin with moss and introduced the worms. Next a rod, long and stout, a thick line, for he wanted to hold whatever he hooked, and a beautiful green float that brought to mind Newton and the apple that fell. Two thick-gutted hooks of a buttonhook strength were tucked inside the only appropriate book available – a

moth-spotted *Selborne*, stolen from an hotel where it had been hung for shaving-paper – and the Novice strolled amiably to the road, along which no one had yet walked or wheeled or seemed likely to do so. Idly, in passing, he pressed the self-starter of the car and the engine coughed and fired, humming as if it were weary of loneliness and regretted its previous failure. But the Novice was not tempted. There was a certain subtle charm about the place, and, after all, it was pleasant to loiter in utter solitude in a mechanistic age, to sprawl awhile among the roots of the world. Stepping easy he descended to the lake, choosing a leeward nook with care, cushioning himself luxuriously.

Ten minutes were spent in assembling rod and line and baiting the hook with an enormous bunch of worms, the entire collection, for he did not want to be disturbed even by a rank smell. Guessing at the depth of the lake the green float was adjusted and, at the third attempt, flung far out. Propping the rod against a convenient rock, the Novice settled himself comfortably, lighting a pipe and removing his shoes for greater ease. Fishing, taken in well-considered doses, had its good points. The sun, though riding fast, was yet hot. At times a sweet evening coolness drifted over the lake, causing leaves to twitch and rustle in merry harmony. Vivid green reeds at the water's edge crossed each other like swords startled into protective movement. Distant lily pads lifting in the breeze looked like the heads of eager swimmers. Dragon-flies shuttled to and fro with scorching suddenness, weaving the fabric of rainbows. A swan beat heavily overhead, silver against the blueness, seeming to pack the air into a path behind it as if preparing a way for some lord of heaven. Long after it had passed the whistling flap of its wings sounded like the gasping of the imagined fleet of swimmers. Distant ridges were like leaping flames strangely, fantastically frozen into stone. Rocks at the feet of the Novice seemed to bear the imprint of great hands. Creation had only just begun; the world was yet soft, new to the sun. The breeze might have been the brushing of fingers impatient

with results. The Novice forgot his pipe, breathing softly, very close to the mystery of being. If he could only sink deep enough into the harmony the essential universe would be revealed. He would need to question no more, but would accept all things as a gift under the seal of a true philosophy. . . .

He dozed, waking at times to gaze affectionately at the gently nodding float. That, too, seemed to share his knowledge. Drowsily he imagined the bunch of worms swaying deep down like a grotesque chandelier, bait for a giant. There was no hurry. This was fishing according to the poets – did poets fish? No torn muscles or temper, no tangled casts or broken oars. He sighed in his contentment and opened the *Selborne*, reading sympathetically.

‘Now a shrew-ash is an ash whose twigs or branches, when gently applied to the limbs of cattle, will immediately relieve the pains which a beast suffers from the running of a shrew-mouse over the part affected, for it is supposed that a shrew-mouse is of so baneful and deleterious a nature that wherever it creeps over a beast, be it horse, cow or sheep, the suffering animal is afflicted with cruel anguish and threatened with the loss of the use of the limb. A shrew-ash was made thus: into the body of the tree a deep hole was bored with an auger, and a poor devoted shrew-mouse was thrust in alive and plugged in. . . .’

The Novice awakened to a movement at his feet, and a mouse, not a shrew, however, peered up at him with shining eyes as if it wished to communicate knowledge, clock-working away after a moment. Dainty creatures. The Novice looked farther, blinking against the reddening sun, searching for the green float. Immediately excited, for the float was gone, he dropped the book and dived for the rod, heedless of stones under his stockinged feet. He stared disbelievingly, and, even as he did so, the line straightened and the rod began to slide. ‘No, you don’t!’ he muttered, and twitched up the rod, striking hard. But there was no sensational response. The rod bent and the winch rasped a little,

but there was hardly a move under water. The Novice began to hop. He struck again, just for luck, and congratulated himself on the stoutness of rod and line.

'We'll have a game with you, my lad. Don't think you can get away as easily as that. Do you know the breaking strain of this line? No? Well, neither do I, but it's certainly beyond *your* weight. Come up! What, you won't? Well, well, we'll see. Now then! Well done! A splendid imitation of a waterlogged suit-case! *But*, it won't work with me! Why, I've landed fish that could swallow the like of you in a gulp. Straining at a gnat - I know. Pretending you are twice two are nine. Want me to get excited, bolt for help, and then off you go with the rod. I know your kind, worse than an umbrella thief! You might just as well come quietly before you break a blood-vessel. No? Well, there's no hurry. Just take your time, but remember, *this* side out, and God help you if you try to foul the line. . . .'

For perhaps ten minutes the Novice harangued his catch, straining at the line from all possible angles but without winning more than a few inches. 'Damned queer!' he finally ejaculated, and set to work in earnest, winding determinedly. A steady strain would hurt neither rod nor line. Now, at last, there was movement under water, a strong jerking reminding of an unbroken colt in harness. The Novice became aware of a trembling in his knees. Here was certainly something out of the ordinary. He recalled tales of enormous pike and trout, fish that had worn whole collections of hooks and spinners in their jaws much as a man might wear trinkets on his watch-chain. Sweating and muttering he tugged and wound steadily, peering down into the lake for a glimpse of this surly crab, careless of the fact that he was paddling in his stockings. Its movement was unlike that of any fish known to him, and he remembered yet another tale of some monstrous fresh-water mussels which had closed upon the feet of two unwary bathers and held them against all their struggles until they drowned. Wildly improbable, but still, wasn't *anything* possible in such a desolate place as this?

Might not the lake be swarming with uncouth creatures surviving from the darkest of the ages?

Ridiculous! He mocked himself and took firmer grip upon the rod. Another two feet of line was gained, and then with electric suddenness the strain relaxed and there was a mighty churning, an ugly snake-head lashing above water, scattering spray far and wide, disappearing again like a steel spring. An eel!

The Novice was profoundly disappointed. A mere eel, when he had hoped for so much. Contemptuous now of his catch he hauled resolutely, and the eel was drawn close, threshing madly with its pouchy head, its white belly flashing. It looked like a tentacle of a large octopus, the more so because it had coiled itself about a green-black boulder in desperate attempt to anchor itself against capture. 'A low trick, my beauty,' the Novice grunted, and considered ways and means of killing the brute. Rather thicker than his wrist, it would be distinctly awkward to hold. The best plan would be to drag it as far from the lake as possible and slice off its head. He wondered what the 'Correct Fisherman' would advise under such circumstances. A pair of blacksmith's tongs would be most useful.

Now the leaden head with its white pouting lips was close enough to cause uncomfortable tremors in the Novice. It was both ugly and vicious. The eel must be ten pounds in weight. 'Come up, you apostrophe!' The Novice dragged at the line, and the eel was drawn over rocks, tail still knotted about the greeny boulder. Boulder? The Novice almost dropped the line in his astonishment. The greenish shape was bumping resoundingly upon the stones. Crusted and dinted, it was yet recognizable as a large metal vessel with wormy tubing at the neck. A strange catch. Stumbling and fuming the Novice dragged the eel many yards from the brink and fumbled for his knife. Immediately the eel snarled itself in the line, relinquishing its hold upon the metal globe. The Novice trod with his stockinged foot upon it, and the eel writhed in tight, slimy loops about his legs. After several

messy attempts to clutch the lunging head he knelt awkwardly and sawed through the squirming flesh an inch from his foot. Blood was splashed as the two halves knotted themselves frenziedly. Death came slowly to the severed flesh, the ugly head burying itself under stones in last conscious attempts at escape, the Novice watching, fascinated and sickened now that it was all over.

A long time after, as it seemed, he joined the slimy lengths, measuring clumsily – eight times the length of his foot. He stood in uneasy thought. Should he claim the capture before Rich, the artist, or fling the horrible fragments far out into the lake and say naught? He could not decide, feeling, now that the sickness had passed, a certain base pride in having conquered such a terror. Gloomily he examined the metal globe, scratching away the grime and crusted weed, surprised to discover the reddish glow of copper. Certainly a find. The globe reminded him of chemistry experiments under the stairs. The worm at the top must have attracted the eel; perhaps it had fallen in love with it as a man might fall in love with a graven likeness. How did an eel's mind work? Absorbed in the thought, he almost collapsed upon the pot as he heard footsteps and a voice.

'Well, I'm damned!' Rich stood and stared, toeing the eel with a grimace of disgust. 'Why must you be catching such rubbish when there are good trout aching for the fly?' He exhibited the five excellent fish in his net to the silent Novice. 'Well, well, 'tis a queer taste you have, though I'm not blaming you. I can do with some of the skin for dressing artificial minnows. We might even try jellied eel for supper.' He eyed the crestfallen Novice, grinning suddenly. 'Cheer up, you old sock-eye! I can remember the time when I should have been strutting proud to catch such a beast. It's against the grain to congratulate you, as you'll agree when you are out of your apprenticeship. 'Tis fishing of a sort, but in the same class as shooting a roosting pheasant. A good catch, though.' He saw the globe. 'Did you disturb him at tea?'

Penitently the Novice gave an account of the capture.

'The eel was wrapped round it? That's a good one, my son, but who's going to believe it? Seriously? Humph!' Rich took the globe into his own hands. 'A nice piece. You know what it is? A pot-still and solid copper at that. A lively history it's got, I'll bet. The eel must have known its value and worn it as a signet ring. You might write an account for the papers . . . What's that? . . . A sense of dignity prevents you; the ethics of literature might be compared with those of fishing! All right, a fair knock.' Chuckling, Rich picked up a length of eel and climbed to the road, leaving the Novice to follow with globe and tail.

All the beauty of evening was about us. The moor seemed to be dreaming, sunk in a magnificent calmness. A clean-cut block of cloud was in the western sky, a marble jetty towards which the sun was riding under full sail. Faint green and purple tints were seeping into the blueness. A dolphin grinned near the sun and dissolved into a feather of spray. The many lakes were darkening, and it was as if eyes were closing in sleep under thick lashes of reeds. A wild duck called and was quiet, reassured by the colour of the sky, convinced that no evil could walk where that colour was.

The road was empty. It would have been strange had it been otherwise. We had come to value the loneliness, warming to each other. The camp was as the Novice had left it, except that Daisy Jane was roosting contentedly in a box of potatoes, perhaps mistaking the potatoes for eggs, much as a lonely man might deliberately delude himself that water was wine. She seemed to have accepted us as friends for, beyond a greeting toss of the head, she made no move. The camp, too, seemed to welcome us, the tent-flaps nodding and the banked turf glowing with sudden spirit. Jocular argument followed as to who should prepare supper, and with the air of a martyr Rich skinned the detested eel and fried slices in butter, often transferring tasty fragments to his mouth in the process. Whistling softly, the Novice sat cross-legged and scraped and burnished the pot-still into a state of splendour. The smell of frying spread in the quiet air, and we were

pleased to imagine that the sun looked round regretfully before vanishing in cloud. Crickets began a cheerful conversation in the surrounding undergrowth, and it was as if they were sharpening many knives preparatory to an attack upon the frying-pan. The two grey crows returned to the ruined cottage and shuffled themselves into the chimney. Far away an ass brayed, the sound leaping across the lakes until at last it fell short and was drowned.

Supper eaten amid mutual congratulations on the savouriness of the dish, we stretched comfortably, smoking in silence, watching the last light draining from the sky. Turf was piled upon the fire, and, as darkness settled, the mound was parted, a glowing tide breaking over us. We felt like kings. Stars acknowledged us in their various ways. The tent might have been a palace of marble instead of a flimsy stretch of canvas. We felt substantial, lords of ourselves and indebted to none, contented with life and begging no single gift. Daisy Jane slept among the potatoes. The pot-still shone in the shadow like a negroid elf to whom we need only call for classic entertainment. We talked of home and of friends over a jug of mulled ale. 'I remember,' said Rich, then paused, for the ass had brayed again, startlingly near. We listened, and presently we heard the clatter of hooves upon stones and a fat little voice singing away as if to inspire courage in a faint heart.

'The first traveller beside ourselves that the road has seen to-day.'

The Novice held up a hand for silence, wondering whether the stranger would pass in ignorance of our presence. We disentangled the words of the song and were amused, imagining a lover:

'O I'm not meself at all, Molly dear, Molly dear,
I'm not meself at all.
Nothing carin', nothing knowin', 'tis after you I'm going,
Faith, your shadow 'tis I'm growing, Molly dear,
And I'm not meself at all!'

The song ended suddenly, and we heard a husky exclamation: 'Jesus and Mary!' The ass had baulked at the car. The car was examined to an accompaniment of astonished grunts, and then the stranger saw the glow of the camp-fire and sought to whip the ass onwards in desperate haste. 'Holy Mother! Trot, damn ye, trot!' We heard the thumping of a fist and a groan. 'Eigh, wisha, 'tis damned I am, and no fault of my own!'

Laughingly Rich called through the darkness, 'Welcome to the fire.'

'Not I, begob!' an agitated voice answered him.

'Why not? 'Tis Englishmen we are, ugly but honest, camping and fishing in this blessed country.'

'Englishmen?'

We could feel curiosity drifting upwards. 'To be sure, and there's beer in the pot to be warming yourself.'

'Beer?' Silence for a moment while the stranger buried his fears, and then we heard him leading the ass up the path to the camp, grunting and creaking as if rusty-jointed, following the path in the darkness as one who knew it very well. The ass stumbled once, but was not rebuked; then two heads appeared, and not for a moment could we tell which belonged to the ass, and which to the man, so alike were they in the dimness.

'Welcome. Come and sit.' Rich made a comfortable place, and refilled the jug nested in the ashes.

The stranger peered cautiously, breathing heavily (for he was fat), shuffling his flat feet, turning the ass adrift before advancing slowly.

'Englishmen, is it?'

'To be sure, but the beer is Irish.'

The stranger laughed uneasily, holding his belly, introducing himself as one come before magistrates. 'I'm called Duffy - Ulick Duffy.'

'A good name.' Rich placed a mug in his fat reluctant hands. 'Here's health.'

Duffy looked up and down and from side to side, and

sipped as if expecting to taste brimstone, but, finding the liquor to his taste, he drank deeply, gulpingly, grinning shyly as he lowered the mug. 'Duffy is the name,' he said, as if that would explain everything. 'Tis welcome ye are on my land.'

'Your land?'

'E'yes! The cottage above do belong to me, though there's no pleasure in the owning of it, such a miserable old shell as it is, and me without a penny or wish to be squaring it up.'

With a melancholy sighing he came closer, and we saw him clearly. Very short and stout he was, with a long unshaven horse-face and large watery eyes, under the weight of which his absurd nose seemed to totter and tremble constantly. A cottony moustache drooped over his thick pursed lips like dead grass over a mushroom. Stringy hair fringed his forehead beneath the broken peak of a cap; the cap might have been an old nest which he had clapped upon his head for warmth. His rusty frieze jacket and trousers were loose upon him, suggesting that he had once been even larger than he now was. What sorrow had thinned him? A thick grey flannel shirt was bunched over his chest, and by its constant movement might have concealed a cat and kittens. The side pockets of his jacket were each weighed with a bottle, these giving him an architectural balance.

Emptying his mug with a thirsty sucking, he squeezed moisture from his moustache with thumb and forefinger and tapped the bottles in his pockets. 'Tis like finding a lamb out of season to be drinking with ye. 'Twas to the village I was traipsing to be filling the two of them.'

He sighed again, and the fire seemed to glow brighter under the breath of him. 'Yis, yis. Wance it wasn't so far by half and the liquor perfect.' He stopped as if he had said too much, coughed lamely and lifted his great feet in turn as if to make sure that he was not treading upon flesh, lowering himself awkwardly to his heels, subsiding like a punctured balloon, rocking a little before tipping back his cap and cupping his chin in his fist. 'Tis a weakness of mine,' he said,

and stared bemusedly into the fire, astonishingly like a huge brooding toad, starting violently as Rich offered tobacco. 'Thank ye.' Shrugging away the thoughts that troubled him, he stared round for material for conversation, sighting after a moment the trout laid upon a stone for salting. 'Good fish,' he said; 'a good catch.'

'But we made a better,' Rich assured him, and pointed to the eel and the copper pot-still beyond.

Duffy was not at all interested in the eel, but stared unbelievably at the still. Rising, he approached and touched it gingerly. 'Holy Mother!' he muttered, 'tis the same!' Turning, he tapped Rich excitedly, 'Will ye sell it?'

'Sell such a treasure!' Rich simulated surprise at such a request, hoping for talk.

But Duffy did not talk at once. 'I'm not blaming ye,' he said miserably, and settled again upon his heels close to the pot, hardly listening to the Novice's tale of the finding of it. 'In the lake was it?' he said at last and nodded to himself, staring fixedly, fingers idly, wastefully shredding the tobacco in his palm. Anxious to dispel such tragic sadness, the Novice filled his mug again and forced it upon him. The brooding Duffy turned and sniffed and stuffed tobacco into his cheek to cover his embarrassment, accepting the mug gratefully, balancing it lovingly in his hands, blinking away the moisture in his eyes. 'Ye must be excusing me,' he said slowly, 'but I never thought to be seeing that pot again or to be reminded of herself whose wealth it was.'

Assured of a tale, the Novice questioned sympathetically, and Duffy sighed and cursed his ass for an impatient movement. 'I'll be telling ye both for your kindness,' he said. 'Twas that poor skeleton of a cottage above that was the cause of it all. To look at it now in its misery ye'd not be believing that no more than twenty months ago 'twas the house of as sweet a creature as Himself ever blessed with wisdom. Heaven was inside for a few of us hereabouts. 'Tis so, 'tis so, and the saints themselves would be persuading ye as well. 'Twas like this. One day a full little jug of a woman

sitting atop as neat an ass as ever I've seen stopped me in the marketing and offers a scribble she'd made with her own quick hands. 'Twas dumb she was, ye see, and she wrote asking me pleasure on this very cottage and to be naming a rent that wouldn't sink a poor lonely woman. 'Twas a lousy mushroom of a place, and it dead and crumbling, and I couldn't be asking more than a breadth of money, and when she heard me with her head tucked on one side she wrote that she'd gladly pile the stones again and make all snug without cost to meself, and for rent she'd barber the head of me as often as the wish was there. Jokey-like we fixed it up, and off she goes and meself blessing the luck from tip to toe, for wasn't she a true creature of the Little Black Rose and I knowing no more of her than her name. But 'twas enough. Ye'd only to look at Bridie Doyle to be feeling the great quality of her. A small tidy little body she was, sweet as an apple and merry in her soul, though the tongue of her was doomed to silence. Out of nowhere she came with her pots and knowledge, and 'twas the gracious will of Himself that she chose the cottage above and meself for landlord.

'Most of a week I gave her to be shaking down, and me thinking of this barbering trick all the time, and the hair of me sprouting like summer thorns in anticipation. I'd doubts in plenty, mind ye. I'd never heard of a woman creature handling a razor before, and I'd be thinking 'twas a jest and she not likely to trim me at all. It didn't seem natural. And then I'd be remembering the true sweetness of her and be telling meself to go and find out.

'Worn thin with dreaming I swings along casual-like one morning just to be judging the repair. A handsome job she'd made of it, and not a stone uncomfortable any more and herself not shy at all of showing me high and low. "A grand job ye've made of it," says I, and "I'm glad ye like it," she scribbles on her slate. I caught her smiling at the scruff of me, and in a minute she writes some more. "Would it be the first week's rent ye've come for?" "It would," says I, bold as I could, and she laughs again, and I followed her inside, and

she dusts a hellish great barbering-chair under the window with the slack of her apron and shakes out a towel and fills a crock with the hottest of water, and meself praying strongly that she'd a steady hand, and it no jest at all. Doubtless so, 'twas comforting to be sitting there. Snug as your heart it was inside; floor swept, pans in their places, cat on the hearth, holy lamp burning and a fine flank of bacon hanging from a beam; 'twas as if the place had been blessed without stint. I tells her so, and she looks up from stropping a razor with a gay breath of a smile that would have pleased a stone. "Sit ye down," she writes, and I do, and she tucks the towel under me collar and it smelling of sweet soap and sunshine so that ye'd know she was one of the cleanest, truest bodies ye'd be liable to find in the world's market. . . .

'Next the soap, and that she spreads over the coarse face of me with as tender a hand as a painter of holiness, sparing no pains at all to soften the scrub. I was nervous of the razor in my newness to her gift, but she takes no offence, only strokes away the beard as lightly as if 'twere down and not bristles stout enough to be tearing the fine skin of herself. "Is it anything else ye would be needing?" she writes when my face was clean, and I'd spent the wonder that was in me for the smoothness of the skin. "Have ye scissors?" I asks, and she nods and begins the trimming of me hair as if she loved it and wouldn't be causing a single hair pain by an untidy snip. In no time at all 'twas done and the litter brushed away, and she holding a bit of mirror just so. Begob and 'twas like looking at meself backwards; I mean 'twas as if she'd trimmed away a dozen years. "Och, duar-na-Criosd! 'Twas never better done!" I cried, and strained myself to be thinking of something else to be employing her nimble hands and holding the smile of herself upon a lonely man. But nothing else could I think of, and I feel for me pipe and begs a flame, offering tobacco with regret that the brand was common. Just as if 'twas yourself she fills a little black devil of a pipe and puffs right happily, and not a word of me going. Pleasantly we sat, and 'twas like heaven to me whose hearth is

empty. I was aching to talk, but every word in me was on its knees in adoration and wouldn't be stepping outside at all. The cat yawned and the kettle sang like an angel, and presently Bridie taps her pipe and measures me well, bustling away out of the house, hopping back again with a little stone bottle black with crumbs of earth. Briskly she pours and holds the cup for me to be drinking, watching with the smiling face of her tucked on one side. I peeped and smelt and sipped, and the room began to glow and the earth to slip. Begob, and 'twas true milk of the sun she was feeding me . . . poteen was a coarse word for it. 'Twas the golden colour of water in stony shallows, and the taste was like full summer with a breath of peat. I felt it colouring meself all over, and thoughts began to splash like fish into a better world. I tried to tell her the magic that was in it, but she knew, for hadn't she made it out of her patience and knowledge. Another sip and I must be going while a scrap of sense remained, else I should be offending her with hands and mouth and spoiling heaven. Twice I thanked her and blessed her too, and promised her a parcel of turf, and she wrote that she'd be glad to see me whenever the face of me was uneasy and such of my friends who wouldn't be talking wild of her gifts. . . .'

Duffy sighed deeply, gazing mournfully into the fire, hands swinging like fat hanged midgets. 'That was the first time. In a week the cottage was a regular port of call for just a few of us. O'Shea would be coming with groceries. Jeff Quirk would be collecting her eggs for market. Patrick Nolan would be bringing her a cut of meat, and Michael O'Keefe would call with a slice of salmon or a string of trout that he'd charmed from the river. Fergus Tobin would be buying her fleeces and bringing her woollens and lengths of frieze to be wearing, and Father Scanlon himself would be calling often to bless Bridie in her affliction and beg her advice on a sick cow or stony hen. Between us all we kept her going, just as ye'd keep a saint in nourishment out of love of his knowledge. Not a smell of silver would Bridie be taking for barbering or

liquor. Generous as a field of flowers she was, happy in friendship and needing nothing, and 'twas blessed paradise for us to be feeling her hands and tasting her brew. If all Ireland could have drunk from the same cup there'd have been universal peace so that all other nations of the world would have been puzzled and wondering when Himself had arrived. 'Twas perfection that visiting, and we wouldn't have sold the right for a bull of gold. The sergeant himself was bothered at such contentedness where he'd been used to strife, and he came sniffing. But a shave was all he got, and that not a good one, for Bridie blunted the razor for him. Bothered he was and humbled too, after Father Scanlon talked to him on the everlasting sweetness of humanity. If he'd been a true turf-born and wise in his soul, we'd have given him the secret, but 'twas from Dublin he came, and him with a face like a padlock and no understanding in him at all. Not a man to trust with anything precious . . . but there, misery is mine, for how should I be judging another when 'twas meself was the cause of calamity, God's curse on the luck that gave me tongue!

Duffy spat into the fire, and by his grimness it might have been his unworthy soul that fell hissing among the bright turves. He pulled his cap low, perhaps that we should not see his unhappy eyes. 'Eight bright months,' he went on, 'and meself the happiest of men, for Bridie had made a promise. At the time, ye see, she was working for perfection in the brew, striving for a liquor that would bring heaven to earth in all its richness, and dear peace to men. 'Twas the soul she was after finding, and when she had it safe her work would be done and she free to be marrying Ulick Duffy. Desperate close I watched the processes. Often and often I'd sit while Bridie slaved at her pots and tubes just back of the cottage, and the sweet fumes would be washing over me and this very head filling with comfortable thoughts that I'd be spilling to Bridie so that she'd smile. I'd be telling her that no man could be wishful of a purer spirit or finer visions than the like of it did rouse in him, but she'd wave me quiet

with a sober look on the darling face of her like ye'd be meeting in pictures of the blessed saints. And I'd be quiet against me will, for wasn't I sharing a mystery that would delight Himself with its beauty. Impatient as any gossoon I'd be, but Bridie was steady on her way as the west wind and wouldn't be hurried. "'Twill come," she'd scribble on her slate, and come it did, though now I'm wishing that the secret had been deeper than the well of Cluanmeala.

"'Twas late one night when the vapour began to please her, and she begging me to stay and tend the fire and taste her success. Excited she was but calm with it, if ye understand me. She'd be watching the blessed drops sliding from the tube, and spreading pots to be blending the stuff, and meself in a glad trance and praying for the perfection that would bring a marriage. We weren't noticing the end of night and the crack of dawn at all, for Bridie was sure she'd won the secret. Presently she gives me a sip of the beoir, smiling with the dear head of her tucked on one side. I drank, and all the coarseness I'd ever known seemed to drop from me like a parcel of old leaves from a tree. 'Twas like being born again into a world all soft and comfortable and lit with rare beauty. Not a sharp edge anywhere, and all things smiling. I could have told ye what Himself was thinking. I could see meself running with the legs of the wind and milking the cows of heaven for the delight of the world. I felt strong as fire and clean as the roof of the sky.

'I wanted to take Bridie to the priest that very minute, but her work wasn't finished and she couldn't be sparing the time till she'd fixed her quantities. So happy I was I could sit still no more than a bog-fly. I begged another sip, and off I trots to be telling friends of the goodness that was being born. The village was quiet as if it had been new-laid. 'Twas at Mass they all were, and meself thinking what a grand opportunity to be spreading the new faith. Into the house I rollicks with a song and a shout. Father Scanlon was preaching a bit. I calls to him to prepare for a wedding, and the whole village staring like a nightmare, and the sergeant himself scratching

about like a hound after rottenness. O'Keefe takes hold of me, and Fergus Tobin after him, but I shook them away and began telling them all of the saint that was in our midst. Ye see, I was thinking they were all empty of meanness as me-self and would be down on their knees with thanks. I didn't notice the sergeant collecting his men or Father Scanlon talking to Jeff Quirk and the rest. I hadn't begun to talk before the good Father bundled me away and poured cold water into me ears. "God forgive ye," he said kindly, and says it yet, he does, and fine hardly understanding what a miserable bodach I was.

"Twas a race between the sergeant and Quirk, but Quirk won, and Bridie was rushed to Cobh and away on a steamer going foreign. Mad as a bull the sergeant was, and 'twas himself smashed the cottage and everything in it and none of us daring to hinder him.'

Duffy shook himself as if touched by a chill wind. The fire had crumbled, and it seemed that the red ruin reminded him forcibly of the death of happiness. Quietly Rich found other turves, and rolled the pot-still close.

'Will you be needing a string to carry it away?' he asked.

Duffy did not at once understand that the globe was a gift. He patted it wistfully as if it were a fat little animal, slowly realizing our intention. 'Not I,' he said gratefully at last. 'It will travel comfortably in me arms. I'm thanking ye. 'Twill be a great consolation to be possessing it. Bridie herself would be thanking ye too.'

He relapsed into misery, and Rich touched him gently. 'Cheer up, man. Maybe there's hope for you yet.'

'Not a hope,' said Duffy sadly; 'for on the ship she met a doctor fellow who loosened her tongue so that she spoke again after thirty years, and in gratitude she married him, and him the brother of a magistrate and a priest who'd not be letting her tamper with the keys of heaven. Bad cess to 'em all and to meself for me weakness.'

There seemed nothing left to say in the face of such melancholy, but we found words of a sort for which Duffy thanked

us. For a little while we sat on in silence, and then Duffy moved with apology after a glance at the stars. Hugging the still, he called the ass from the shadows: 'Here, Bright!' His long horse-face twitched as he bade us good night. We shook his cold limp hand. The Novice would have offered him whisky, but Rich in his wisdom restrained him. 'He'd not be relishing it with the memory of that other stuff in mind.' We watched him go, and hoped that we would meet again. Duffy hoped so too, but without much conviction; it was as if he had stepped from another world to tell the tale and now was returning. We heard him gain the road, mount the ass gaspingly, and urge it homewards in a voice curiously thin and gentle. Hooves clattered, and presently the sound died, and we were alone again save for a ghost that moved about the wrecked cottage.

We said but little as we prepared for bed, turning over the tale in our minds. Comfortably settled in our sleeping-bags, back to back for protection against the loneliness outside, we sighed and shared an apple, having forgotten to brush our teeth.

'A good day,' said the practical Rich, remembering the trout listed in his diary.

The Novice pondered. 'If only we could find a gallon or so of that poteen.'

'Why?' demanded Rich.

'So that I could drink and write the tale as it was told.'

'Try China tea with lemon.'

The Novice grunted and dropped his apple-core into Rich's boot. 'May you marry the daughter of a breeder of goldfish.'

'And thee the widow of Old Moore!'

'Idiot!'

Backs were bumped together. We sighed and wriggled ourselves towards sleep. The Novice wanted to tell Rich that the proper name Bright or Bride signified a fiery dart, and was the name of the goddess of poetry in the pagan days of Ireland. But Rich was already asleep. The Novice fum-

bled for a pencil, but sleep tied his fingers, and the great thought was irretrievably lost to humanity.

★

Unexpectedly the tale has a sequel.

Two days were spent at Lonely Camp on that occasion. On the third day we turned about somewhat regretfully and crossed to Cork to meet the Third Man by arrangement. Duffy's tale was told among others several days later, and the Third Man became anxious to prove the loneliness of the camp. So, in due course, we once again anchored between lake and cottage. But fishing was bad, and the Third Man, quickly convinced of the loneliness of the place for all the presence of Daisy Jane, suggested a move towards civilization. Packing in record time we drove on across the moor, arriving later at a village where it seemed convenient to buy bread and salt. The Novice, waiting alone in the car, was presently astonished to see Duffy appear in a near-by doorway. Greetings were exchanged, and then Duffy vanished with a prodigious winking, reappearing with a bottle hidden under his coat. "'Tis meself is after the secret,' he whispered, and tucked the bottle beside the Novice, well out of sight, himself hopping away into the house like a gleeful frog. Careful of his secret, and aware of the inquisitive gaze of a civic guard stationed outside O'Rourke's Medical Hall, the Novice did not reveal the bottle at once. Later, privacy assured, it was opened and the smoky liquid tasted. The liquor was, we judged, potent enough to run a petrol engine, and tasted as might gunpowder steeped in vinegar. Now the bottle stands in honoured security upon a mantelshelf, and to the curious we explain, 'a rust remover,' hoping always in our hearts for Duffy's ultimate success and the rejuvenation of the world by way of the bottle.

*Happy Ending*¹

OLBIA B.C. 220

BY NAOMI MITCHISON.

THE current of the river was bringing down great jagged pieces of sheet ice that swung into one another and jarred and thudded and smashed and broke up in the rocking salt water of the harbour; some of them had twigs and pine cones stuck in them from the gods alone knew how far up in Scythia; one or two, even, had sledge marks. They were a good deal thicker than they looked, but the thickness was all under water. Demeas sat on a pile of stripped and resin-smelling logs and watched them, instead of going to look for work. He had, however, still got five drachmas left in his purse between his father and himself and starvation. So there wasn't any desperate hurry. And the sun was coming out with a will now, bright and hot. Soon it would be summer; then they wouldn't have to pay so much for fuel! One could almost, but not quite, take off one's thick cloak. He was looking at a merchant ship that had made fast to the quay beside him, a coaster that was coming round early to get the first markets, a squat, broad-bottomed creature with ten row-ports a side. The slaves were hauling up buckets of water to wash down her deck, for she had been carrying cattle. God, a chilly and mucky business!

Demeas wished very much that something would happen. If it didn't soon he would have to go off after to-day's job, carrying bales of stinking furs about again, he supposed—God, why hadn't he been bred up to a skilled trade instead

¹ From *The Delicate Fire*, by Naomi Mitchison, by permission of Messrs. Jonathan Cape, Ltd.

of going to so many lectures! Then one of the men who was washing the deck walked to the edge with a bucket and instead of dipping it walked overboard himself into the sea. He struck out at once, but then, apparently, stopped, and a large piece of ice came at him edge-on. Demeas dropped his cloak and dived cleverly into a clear patch after the man; the water was so much colder than it had looked in the sunshine that it took his breath away completely, and it was the merest luck that he grabbed a handful of hair and pulled the man out from under a block of ice that had ridden quietly and nicely over him. He swam extremely hard away from the ice, pulling the man after him in jerks, and got to a ladder up on to the jetty on the other side, where a sailor helped him to haul out the thing he had saved; his own hands were numb and burning with cold. However, someone had brought round his cloak, so he pulled off his wet things and huddled himself quickly into the warm wool.

The man was unconscious, not drowned – he could only have swallowed a few mouthfuls of water, and when they emptied out his throat he could breathe – but the ice had knocked him on the head and he was bleeding fast. Another young man, one of Demeas' many acquaintances, turned up and helped with the wound and produced another cloak. They saw the ship's captain coming along to reclaim his property; Demeas said he hoped he'd get something a bit solidier than thanks out of him!

'I doubt it,' said his friend; 'that man's a real tough, a Marob man and a proper barbarian. I should think,' he went on, prodding the wet slave with the toe of his shoe, 'that this poor devil jumped overboard to get away from him. He's got a decent face.'

Demeas looked at the man a little more carefully: 'Could he be a Hellene?'

'He might,' the other said, 'these days. That captain's got a nasty way of kicking them; I suppose this one will be for it when he comes to.' He smiled a little, because he rather liked ironic ideas, as that was. They fitted in with the world.

'Mm,' said Demeas, and stooped quickly. 'You back me up!' He undid the end of the rag round the man's head and smeared a good lot of blood into his ears and nostrils. 'The captain's drunk enough for me to chance it.' He hugged himself up in his cloak, still pretty cold. The captain came wallowing up; it was early in the day to be so drunk, but the market was not till to-morrow. 'No good,' said Demeas apologetically, 'he's done for.'

'Why, he's breathing!' said the captain with a smelly laugh. 'You don't know us sailors, you don't. Takes more than that to drown us.'

'He's smashed in his skull,' said Demeas, 'the bone's loose. I didn't even finish tying it up! He's bleeding from the ears - that's a sure sign.'

The captain made an ugly face and lived up to his reputation by kicking the man in the groin. 'Thirty drachs I gave for him in Abdera,' he said pathetically, 'the dirty bastard, falling overboard in harbour as if he was a baby!' He verified the bleeding at the ears, but seemed uninclined to leave. Demeas murmured something about his having done his best at great personal inconvenience; the captain produced a few thanks but nothing more tangible. Demeas' friend, suddenly discovering that he was a surgeon, gave the man three hours, which seemed a plausible time. 'Hell!' said the captain, 'what am I to do, a poor man like me?'

Demeas produced two of his drachmas, with the air of a fine gentleman. 'I'll give you that for him, considering I fished him out! Do for a drink, what?'

'All very well for you,' said the captain, 'with money to throw about -' Then he got rather muddled as to what he meant and took the money, spat in the man's face, and turned and humped himself away.

'No,' said Demeas, 'I don't feel at all dishonest. But I suppose he is going to live? How am I to get him home? Here' - for his friend was beginning to drift off - 'don't start telling everyone till that ship's sailed. Yes, you can have your cloak back to-morrow. But what the devil I'm to do -'

'God knows,' said the other one gently, over his shoulder.

First of all, Demeas spread his own tunic out in the sun to dry, and then he thought he might as well do the same for his new property, so he pulled off his canvas shirt and trousers – the man was dressed barbarian fashion – and was rather horrified to find how cold he was. Reluctantly he took off one of the two warm cloaks and wrapped it round the slave's body. Then he sat down again as much as possible in the sun and went on watching the ice; at any rate this stopped him being a fur porter! After a time he saw that the man's eyes were open and staring at him. He put on his own clothes which were now dryish. 'Come on!' he said, and heaved the man on to his feet; he rocked and gave at the joints a good deal and held on to his head with both hands as if he were afraid it would come off. Demeas hitched the cloak over him, picked up the other things and hurried him as fast as he dared till they were out of sight of the ship. They got to the right street and the right house, and so, with much hauling up the stairs, into the loft.

But, when his senses gradually cleared, Aglaos had forgotten most of this. He did not even remember the fall into the water and the way he had struck out instinctively before he could stop himself. The last thing he remembered at all was looking out at the jarring and splintering of the ice-blocks from the deck of the ship and thinking what a good way it would be. After that there were some dimmish voices and a good deal of pain and effort and sickness. Then a slow realization that he was awake and listening to an argument, and, if he did not move his head, it did not hurt him. The argument was, appropriately enough, about suicide; he wondered for some time how he had got home. Had he had bad dreams lasting for three years? The older voice, whom he visualized for some reason as his father, till he remembered that his father was dead, was defending the business of killing oneself with all the proper Stoic arguments. The younger seemed to be defending himself, rather crossly. It gradually occurred to Aglaos that the younger

one must have fished him out from between the ice-block and so prevented him from doing what he had meant to do. He agreed with the elder one! On the other hand, a good Stoic would not have done it on the spur of the moment and simply as an escape, a relief from misery. He must explain that, go into the argument himself. Very slowly he turned his head so that he was facing the room.

He seemed to be looking at it from below. Ah, now he understood, he was lying on the floor. The room was very low at one side, and the window was on his own level, with a view of tiles; for some time he lost the argument in counting tiles. But the roof of the room, naked under more red tiles, sloped up to a plaster wall at the other side, on which someone had made mathematical drawings in red and black. There was a pot of charcoal in the middle, and the two arguers were on stools at each side, leaning over it, warming their hands. He was cold too, and what odd pains he had in his body! There was a chest, a couple of mattresses with blankets tangled up on them, a cooking-pot on its side, a few jars and dishes, one of a pair of shoes: it worried him that he could not see the second shoe. He said: 'I do not think I can blame anyone for stopping me, for I was not giving myself death as a good Stoic would have, after considering that all other courses would lead him away from freedom, but because I was already unfree. I was bound by pain and - and -' He was after all finding it difficult to speak.

The elder man looked down, frowning at him across the charcoal pot, and said: 'I suppose from that you claim to be a Stoic?'

'Yes,' said Aglaos, 'I suppose I do.'

'You appear to have been a very bad one,' said the elder man.

Aglaos found he could now move a little more. He said: 'Zeno himself would have been hard put to it to lead the good life on that ship.'

'Pytheas was a slave at one time. During those years he was accumulating material for his Dialectics.'

'Yes. I've heard him lecture. But he was in a decent house with a good master when - when - Oh, Father Zeus!' cried Aglaos, '*where is that ship?*' He shoved himself half-way up on his elbows and looked round, because he suddenly felt very dizzy, as if he was going to wake and find himself - there.

The younger man was over beside him in two steps, with an arm under his head: 'Ssh! Lie down. You won't ever see that ship again if you're sensible.'

'Why not?'

'Because I made the captain think you were dying and bought you off him for two drachs.'

Aglaos reflected. 'The captain must have been drunk.'

'He was.'

'He often is. Then he's worst. But now - I belong to you?'

'Yes, stupid. What's your name? Aglaos? I didn't even know you were a Hellene when I jumped in after you. I'm Demeas, son of Timoklides. That's my father. He likes arguing better than anything in the world. I don't. You mustn't start arguing with him now. Go to sleep.'

And apparently Aglaos did what his new master told him, for nothing more seemed to happen, except that he got much warmer, so someone must have put a blanket over him, until the next morning when he woke again, very thirsty but only with a little headache. Demeas had just re-lighted the charcoal stove and was standing back observing it, very much pleased with himself. As he turned away, Aglaos sat up. 'Oh, you're awake again, are you?' Demeas said. 'Better? That's right. Now listen. I'm going out to work. You'll have to do that too, but not till the ship's sailed. To-day you can tidy up the room; it looks as if it needed it. And keep the stove alight. Can you stay on your feet?'

Aglaos got up, holding to the wall, and found it was not so very difficult. But he was lame and sore from the captain's parting kick. 'May I get some water?' he said.

'You oughtn't to be thirsty after the ducking you had! Still, here you are. It's about all you'll get too. If you find anything to eat in the room you're welcome to eat it. There

very likely is some bread somewhere; it gets all over the place. However, if you're a Stoic, little things like that won't matter, will they? I wish I was!' He pulled down the canvas shirt and trousers and tossed them over to Aglaos, who failed to catch them. 'You might put on your own clothes again. What you're wearing now is my only decent tunic. Thanks, yes. By the way, if Boa comes for the rent, tell her I've got a wonderful job and I've bought you with the proceeds. She's quite an old dear, a Paphlagonian or something, you know, but she does insist rather much on being paid. Go down and talk to her if you like. Father won't be back till late, and I don't suppose I shall.' He collected his own tunic from Aglaos: 'Not lousy? Splendid! But I should cut my hair some time if I were you. Father goes to his pupils all day and gets his meals with them. The worst of it is, he's always been terribly fussy about not being paid, and he won't be paid still! Otherwise I could live on him nicely. Well, good-bye, Aglaos. If you run away the captain'll get you, so don't.'

Aglaos gradually tidied the room, found some very stale barley bread, which he ate, and washed all the dishes and cups, most of which wanted it badly. It was marvellous being alone again, out of hearing of the others squabbling and snoring and spitting, and screaming when they were suddenly kicked or hit. It was so soft, so delicious to be alone! Able to think. He would be alone now for hours, and then the other two would come back and find how different the room looked and be pleased with him. His headache was almost gone.

In the afternoon he explored downstairs. Their room was a loft up steep steps from the main room of the house. It was all very well Demeas saying to keep in the fire, but there wasn't much charcoal. He wondered if he could come across any down there. He arrived at a kitchen, but there was not much chance of getting any, as the landlady was cooking, and several children were there too and getting very much in her way. She was not a very encouraging

lady, but it was wonderful to realize that however much she barked she could not bite him! She did not appear to believe his story of Demeas and the excellent job. However, he played houses with the children and kept them quiet for her, so that she was quite friendly by the end. When she went out with the elder ones, leaving him in charge of the youngest, who was obviously too small to notice or tell, he collected two or three pieces of her charcoal. Demeas came back tired and rather cross, with a hare and some onions for supper. Neither of them had ever skinned a hare, so it was not so satisfactory as it might have been. Still, Demeas was much pleased that Boa had taken to him. 'I played with her children,' said Aglaos.

'I'm not good at playing with children,' said Demeas, 'they always spoil my games!'

Aglaos said: 'I like them.' He was putting the pot with the rest of the hare into a corner to keep for to-morrow.

Demeas said very quickly: 'Did you have children?'

Aglaos gasped a little at this sudden ducking into the past. He said: 'I had a small baby.'

'Where?'

'At home. In Mantinea.'

'You're a Mantinean, are you? That was a foul business.' But Aglaos suddenly found his head and body aching unbearably again; the room swung about. He just heard Demeas say: 'Lie down now or father'll make you argue with him all night.' And then he must have slept at once, and slept deeply, his mind taking this refuge from the pain of remembrance which it was menaced by.

Three days later, the ship having sailed, he and Demeas went off together to work. Demeas had a job of sorts with a fur merchant, sorting and packing and carrying about the skins that were brought in from the forests by various savages who liked to be paid in bar metal or else in kind with oil, wine and sweet foods - paste of dates and almonds - or else in the coarsely and thickly embroidered linens that were made for the barbarian market. He thought they

would take on Aglaos too. If so he would get the wages and would either be able to live in luxury (anyway, be able to pay his rent and have enough food and drink to ask his friends to supper), or else he would live as now but would not have to work himself. Either possibility had its points. He said suddenly: 'It must have been a bad business at Mantinea.'

'It was,' said Aglaos.

'What happened? You'd much better tell me. It's all in your head, I suppose, now I've started you, and you must get it out.'

'Very well,' said Aglaos. For a little time he walked along slowly, for he was still very stiff, saying nothing. He seemed to be getting it all together. At last he said: 'You know what happened at the beginning? We sided with Sparta and King Kleomenes. That was, I think, right, but it was not so right that some of us should have shown it by killing all the Achæans in the town. However, these things happen. I had friends in Sparta, of the King's party; they told me how things were going, how Kleomenes was coming to help the poor all over Greece, those who had debts and no land. When he had finished with Aratos and the Achæan League he would go round the cities, dividing up the land and cancelling debts. We were not rich ourselves, but yet not poor. It was not for our advantage as a family. Yet it seemed to me that if this revolution happened in Mantinea, it might save us from a worse one. It was better for the poor to be helped reasonably by Kleomenes than to get to the point of despair where they would help themselves unreasonably. So we were prepared, most of us, to take it gladly. But then Aratos sold the Achæan League to Antigonos of Macedonia for his help against Sparta.'

'I know; it was Antigonos who took your city.'

'I am not sure if it was he or Aratos who revenged those Achæan settlers on us. We knew something would happen about that. Some of those who had done it escaped, others were seized and killed at once without trial. We had to

accept that. After the end of the siege it was very, very quiet in Mantinea – quiet for us, I mean. They were gay enough! We kept in our houses, only going out perhaps in the early morning, hurriedly, to get food. We could not let our womenfolk go out at all. Some quarters had been burnt during the siege and we were lodging householders from there. Besides that, of course, we had soldiers billeted on us, Achæans and Macedonians, and had to feed and look after them well. The ones in our house seemed decent enough; they joked with the slave girls, who didn't mind; but they had not even seen my wife or the two women – one was a cousin of mine – from the burnt quarters. They kept close in their rooms and I think only talked in whispers.'

'Were you long married?'

'Rather more than a year,' said Aglaos. 'I am trying to tell this as though it had happened to someone else, or long, long ago, in Troy time. She was the daughter of our friends and neighbours. You know how it is in a city; one lives very close, generation after generation. We'd played together as children. I knew her father and brother well; the brother had been wounded, fighting on the wall. I had been so happy with her that now I just cannot remember it at all as it was. We had a baby.'

'A son?'

'Yes, yes, everything one wanted! During the siege and those two days afterwards we told one another, she and I, that these bad times would pass. Even if in the end we were left quite poor, we would work for one another; we would still keep our books and our friends. Even if we had no cakes nor wine for them, no cushions, no pretty toys to amuse them with, we'd still have spring water and violets and nightingales, and the talk would go on just the same. She cared for that, you see; it might have been better for her if she hadn't. She had read nearly as much as I had; I took her with me to lectures sometimes. And then – The first I knew was that the men who were billeted on us came back at noon shouting and laughing; I thought they were

drunk already and I went to meet them, for I was afraid they might break something more. When they saw me the leader of them stopped laughing, but he grinned and said: "Bring along your women now, my man, for I'm going to make my choice." I didn't answer back; I stepped aside and said nothing; I thought he had just turned nasty for the moment. Then one of the others said: "He hasn't heard the news!" So they told me.'

'You were all separated, weren't you? - the men to Macedonia, the women and children to be sold to the new colonists? One sees why they did that, but - Go on, Aglaos.'

'I didn't believe it, so they told me to get proof and then come back. I went out into the street and up towards the market-place. I found it was true. About twenty of us, I among them, tried to get to Aratos and appeal to him personally. We never got near him - if he was still in the town at all. No one else we saw listened for one moment. One or two seemed ashamed, but most just cursed and laughed and had us kicked out. I met my brother-in-law and asked him to come back to the house with me. So he did, and we slipped in and through to the women's rooms without the soldiers seeing us. I dreaded most terribly telling my wife. But there was no need to; she knew. Her mother was there; she'd done some things up in a bundle and just walked across the town, in the state it was: a stout old woman. "I'll stick by my girl as long as I can," she said, and then she said very little more, but sat there with her lips pressed up and a grip on her bundle. My own mother was dead and I had no sister.

'My wife came to me and took my hands. She said: "If this is the last time, dear heart, we will not spoil it." She put her arms round my neck and kissed me; we stayed so for a few minutes. We let one another go and sat down side by side, very close. She said: "I have been thinking of all the books we have read together and the stories of good men. Do we kill ourselves now?" I think we were both

trembling a good deal; I could not answer. Her brother said: "You cannot, because of your baby." She said: "I have been thinking of that. In the books it is always a man who is wise." One of the other women – my cousin – said what I suppose was in all our minds: "Is it better for them to live and be slaves?" She looked towards the children; she had rather an older one of her own. Our baby was awake and moving his hands about, as they do. My wife said: "Oh, I can't kill him!" And for the first time she began to cry. I made up my mind; I said: "There's no question of that. We will live through this and keep our souls free and our children's souls." My brother-in-law said: "I think you are right. If we are good Stoics we can do this." My wife said: "It will be easier for you." I said: "I know. It will be twice as difficult for you. You will have two souls to keep straight, your own and my son's."

"I don't remember everything we said after that. We had, I suppose, about an hour together. The husband of one of the other women managed to get to us too. I remember suddenly that my wife began laughing and then she said: "I had forgotten for the moment that this was really happening to us. I was thinking it was something we had made up to test our minds." (For we had often discussed what the lover of good would do in one or another position.) Then she shook a good deal and said: "Is it really true?" I said: "As true as these things ever are. But not deeply true, only an appearance. Under that we are all calm and secure and part of Goodness and Life. We are in one universe with the stars and the hills and one another; nothing can separate us. It is a spiritual universe and cannot be shattered by material disasters." I believed that then and spoke as if I did. I think it was some comfort for us all.

"I remember saying to my wife that I wished she were an ordinary woman to whom these things that must come to her would mean less pain, and she said no, it was better to have great pain but keep one's mind bright, and she said that, though there was half the world between us, she and

I would often be thinking of the same kind of ideas at the same time. She talked to her brother too, asking him if he remembered things they had done together as children; we all talked breathlessly, trying to say everything for a lifetime in those few minutes. Part of the time I took her on my knees while she held our baby, and we just whispered each other's names over and over. We tried to make some plan for the future too. I said I would come back to Mantinea and find her again, and, whatever had happened, to either of us, I would get her back. I said she must teach my child to look forward to that. I asked her if I should try in the time left us to get some decent man to promise to buy her. But I think she realized how little chance of that there was, and told me to stay. She said it would be better for me if I did not know who her master was to be. She had always been kind to me and perhaps this was the kindest thing she ever did. For now, when I am hopeful, I can imagine she was bought by some older man who would treat her and our son honourably for the sake of the gods.

'At the end of the hour a good many soldiers came, as well as those who were billeted in our house. They went through all the rooms, putting together anything that was valuable and seeing that no one was hiding. Their captain said to us: "Time's up," but he gave my brother-in-law and me one moment more to say good-bye. Then we were chained. My wife had been standing very steady and silent and smiling, but when she saw me chained she suddenly tried to run to me. But one of the soldiers barred her way with a spear.'

'And then?'

'Then we were marched north to Macedonia, and any who were old or badly wounded died, unless they had the luck to be taken in by people on the way. A few of us were rescued by friends in towns we passed through, for no one liked the look of us being beaten on by Macedonians, but sometimes they refused to sell - their orders were to bring us up out of Greece. Then we were sold in gangs. My

brother-in-law and I were together for some time; I was able to help him – his wound did not heal well – and we could talk. But by and by the gangs were broken up, at least ours was. I was sold to the captain of that ship; he'd got to Abdera short-handed one voyage, worse luck for me. They said he'd kicked the last man to death. I think that was probably not true. I wished I had ever been taught a skilled trade; but of course I had not been. Reading and writing were no help – unless one were sold to the barbarians, to Rome or one of those outer towns. But perhaps anything was better than that. I know it must have happened to some of us, any who had special skill at doctoring or writing quickly in a good hand, or mathematics or dialectic even. They were shipped off to Delos and from that terrible place to Rome or Carthage or beyond.'

They had nearly come to their fur-trader's warehouse. Demeas sat down on the wall of a well and began to re-lace his shoe. On the ground, where the shadows of the houses came, there was still a dirty hardness of trampled snow and ice, but the well-water was dark and unfrozen. He was thinking aloud: 'Yes, we could both do with a skilled trade! If I learnt one while you did this job? One's father might have considered what the world was going to be like. . . . Aglaos, if you could still remember that last day and the things you said to your wife, you had no business to try and kill yourself.'

'I know,' said Aglaos, 'and now I'm ashamed. But I'd said that to myself month after month, and there seemed no chance at all of my being able to do anything about it ever. Until, from being a hope and a comfort, it came to being torture. And in winter there were these long black nights up here when I couldn't sleep for cold and memories. They wore me out; I've had nearly three years of it. I know very well that I'm not as brave as I thought or hoped I was.'

Demeas said: 'But do you still want to go back to Mantinea? You may find all sorts of things there worse than

you imagine. Your wife may have been sold outside the city now. Your son may be dead.'

'Don't think I haven't imagined all that! The chances are against her being sold into another place, but it may have happened all the same. And I know it's hard for a slave woman to keep a young baby. Her master and mistress may say - Yes, Demeas, I've thought of all that.'

'Your wife may have other children. She may have found a master who's set her free and is keeping her better than you'll ever be able to after this; she mayn't have any welcome for you.'

'I doubt that, but I know it's possible. I know it is very likely that she has been through all kinds of shame and that her soul was broken by it, as mine was. I know everything may be finished.'

'What would you do, even? Your city has lost her name. She's not lovely Mantinea any more, but Antigonea, named after her conqueror, not a free city ever any more, Aglaos! You've no home in Antigonea.'

'I know that too. The only thing about it is that it's the name of a dead man now. The gods closed their hands on him at last. But I do think, though your father might not agree with me, that I could be a good enough Stoic to face the worst, now that you've given me this breathing-space to get myself disentangled.' He stood in front of Demeas and looked at him twice and began to speak and checked himself and at last said: 'Does this mean that you will let me earn my freedom and go?'

'Oh, I suppose so, I suppose so,' said Demeas, 'though it's very annoying, because otherwise I could have lived on you all my life, and besides you could have argued with father instead of me. I'll set you a good stiff price, mind! You can't go off to-morrow. Still, you'll probably work harder than I do, so they'll pay you better. My dear Aglaos, I do beg of you not to go kissing my hand in the middle of the street! What else could I decently have done?'

Hellmut Lies in the Sun

BY EDWARD SACKVILLE-WEST

Enough! or too much.—BLAKE

I

HELLMUT lay in the sun, on the sand near the water. Was the latter moving or not? In the Spreewald it is often difficult to tell what is river and what merely standing water — lakes, small pools, runnels — a liquid maze which splits the huge forest of low firs into the appearance of a succession of plantations.

It was at the beginning of August, and the weather was still and very hot. So Hellmut lay in the sun, naked save for a square of white linen. With one hand he shielded his eyes from the sun, with the other he dug about in the hot dry sand, which slipped through his fingers like some sort of tangible air. Occasionally he would come across the coarse threads of the brownish grass which grew sparsely everywhere around; these he pulled up and threw away without looking at them.

His body, long and thin, smooth and pale brown, looked uncomfortably stiff in the joints — like a doll whose limbs, not adapted to a horizontal position, will not sink flat. A sultry breeze blew from time to time over it — a faint gust, then a stronger one — up from the feet to the body and on under the shading hand. Hellmut breathed in the hot smell of the firs.

‘To dive upwards,’ he said aloud, and stretched his arm above his head, freeing the whole of his face. His eyes were wide open, which gave to his face an artificial expression of

terror; for the eyes were very prominent, with staring bluish-white round the brown iris. It was altogether a thin face, across which the strong-looking pale brown skin was drawn tightly like fine leather. The lips were bloodless, but not thin. In profile, Hellmut was an ageless and contemplative warrior: in full face a terrified, but determined and rather grasping, young man in the twenties.

After staring for a moment into the brilliant sky he half closed his eyes, and digging his chin into his chest looked past the corner of a collection of firs across the water to where, on the opposite piece of land, stood a high, round tower. Hellmut wondered at it (not for the first time) and decided lazily that it was worth a visit in the near future. 'We'll all three go,' he said to himself. The inside of the tower was lighted by an ascending scale of round-topped glassless windows. The whole was of grey concrete, with a small dome on top, and looked as if it had been cast in a single piece. It was exceedingly simple and quite unornamented; Hellmut found it beautiful and rather strange. As he looked, two heads appeared one after another in neighbouring windows half-way up the tower. The highest was that of a girl with dark, bushy, shingled hair; the lowest that of a young man whose face and hair seemed equally the colour of white bread crust.

Hellmut's mouth smiled and making a trumpet of his hands he shouted: 'Gerda! Willibald!'

The heads perked attentively, looked at one another. Then two hands emerged and waved.

An unhasting bird with wide wings slanted down past the tower, like an outspread hand sketching a gesture, and disturbed the meaning of the waving couple, who now disappeared inside the tower.

'These treasures of earth . . .' whispered Hellmut, still looking across the water and making no endeavour, for once, to interrupt the natural rhetoric of his mind.

Suddenly a canoe appeared round the firs and came swiftly across the water towards him. Gerda and her

brother Willibald paddled easily, with the effortless rhythm of concerted practice. Both were dressed only in bathing suits, he in dark blue, she in pale green. When they got near to the shore, where the water was very shallow, they sprang out and walked to land, leaving the canoe rocking on the still, sun-locked water. Then, breaking into sudden, causeless laughter, they threw themselves down on the sand, one on each side of Hellmut's legs. Each took hold of one of his ankles and forced the leg up and down, as if for a physical exercise.

Hellmut sat up and yawned. 'Energy itself!' he exclaimed, and laughed. But as he did so his eyes opened wide again and the expression of fear quite spoilt the effect of gaiety.

'I'm hungry,' said Willibald.

'Yes, I'm ready to eat foo.' Gerda began to stroke Willibald's thick hair.

Hellmut put down his head and stared. '*Du Semmel-blonder Mensch,*' he said slowly.

Willibald's face was triumphantly ugly, the features ill-assorted: his under-lip hung repulsively, his pale eyes were small and buried in the flesh, his nose turned up without charm, his forehead bulged unimpressively and seemed to have no connection with the upper part of his head, like the imitation skin which continues a cheap theatrical wig.

'What a happy life!' he exclaimed, and threw out his hands.

Escaping, for three whole weeks, from Berlin and the indoor life of students, the three young people had flung themselves without hesitation into the Spreewald – into the sun. They had taken with them a canoe, which could be folded up and carried whenever it became pleasanter to proceed by land to some other water. Food they bought in the various villages, which always seemed to occur conveniently without disturbing the wildness and loneliness of the country.

The instituter of the expedition was Gerda, and according

to her original plan it was to have consisted solely of herself and her brother. But at the last moment Willibald had insisted on including Hellmut. His insistence had been final and violent, as who should thrust his foot into a closing door. Gerda had hesitated, saying nothing. She had known Hellmut longer than had Willibald, and was aware of what a black cloud he was capable suddenly of becoming. But in the near end she gave in and Hellmut came. Willibald had explained himself, speaking impatiently fast with lips whose looseness did not look moral. 'He warnts taking out of himself even more than we do, Gerda. I've seen more of him lately than you have, and I know . . . I feel responsible. Something might happen. After all, neither of us dislikes him?' Gerda had had to admit that they didn't. And yet . . .

She found that her thoughts could never go straight to Hellmut. They swung out first to her brother and then, obliquely, down to Hellmut; he stood below them, as on a lower step of a great shallow staircase – in the shadow, while they were in the light. Conventionally speaking, she knew Hellmut very well; but her knowledge was tempered by the feeling that he and Willibald had shared one experience in which she had had no part – not because it was outside her range, but adventitiously. Their life in Berlin, shared to an extent which all felt to be uncomfortable, morbid, and cramping, was almost entirely hateful to Gerda; but she could not avoid it. Her family, comfortably off before the War, had lost everything during the Inflation, and she had to make her own living in secretarial work in order that Willibald might be able to pursue his studies as an architect. She did not resent this arrangement in the least, or even feel that she was unnecessarily sacrificing herself; it was the social adjuncts to her life – the way in which the young men and women of her age chose to treat one another, and the dubious spiritual capital thus amassed – that caused her constant uneasiness and misgiving and a sense of undifferentiated fear. For she had kept her head during the

Inflation and the unrest which had attended it, and so had not been left with the inevitable, passionate egotism produced by a sudden sharp struggle for existence, and therefore characteristic of the young people in her position in Berlin. Her brother had not kept his head and Hellmut had definitely lost his: this she knew. But she had not been able to judge of the extent to which either had abandoned himself to spiritual bankruptcy, or yet the exact nature of the despair she divined in both of them.

Despair in itself did not surprise her: she had felt it more than once, while wondering if so many billion marks would be enough to buy her evening meal and had then heard shooting in the street outside, which made it impossible to attempt to go and buy anything. But even then – even at the worst time of all, when she had seen her elder brother killed by a flying bullet during the Kapp *Putsch* – she had called her soul her own, firmly and precisely reckoning up her accounts with existence, to preserve her sense of values for the better times to come. Those around her had not thought that things would ever improve and they had tried obstinately to drag Gerda down into their own slough of despond. But she refused to go with them: she felt that she knew better. She watched her brother Willibald industriously throwing everything to the winds day by day, strewing his youth broadcast among the ruined stones of post-War Germany; she watched and said little, knowing that he would not listen if she spoke.

Then things did eventually improve and the stabilization of the mark made it possible for Gerda and Willibald to live at least without anxiety.

The first sigh of relief caught in her throat when she realized that the spiritual balance of her brother and her friends had been irretrievably lost. Their souls continued to dither hysterically, unanchored, and given over to opposing demons, as if their bodies had received a series of terrible blows. They rushed hither and thither in a fever of work, passionate weeping hanging like a cloud behind their eyes

and implied in the very forms of their speech. There was a horrible serious intentness in their pleasures too, which frightened Gerda even more. She could not imagine why it was that she alone seemed to have escaped infection, and, horrified as she was, she almost wished that she were unable to see the life so clearly.

But, above all else, it was the continual sharing and lack of privacy that nearly drove Gerda mad. Those about her seemed never for an instant to be able to bear solitude of any kind; they shared everything – meals, lovers, emotions of the meanest as well as of the noblest order. Personal contacts were conducted on the model of those gardens in Berlin which have but a single place of ingress and egress, so that no one who does not intend to use the garden as such may simply use it as a short cut to somewhere else. But, of course, any number of people may enter such a garden at once, and the attempt at privacy results in a mere farce.

Now she knew what Willibald had meant when he suggested that Hellmut 'wanted taking out of himself'; it meant simply 'cannot be left alone.' Gerda might have retorted: 'Why should we be responsible? Why must I have my holiday spoilt by this gloomy, neurotic man?' But she did not. She felt – and the hard times had impressed this lesson upon her – that she was perhaps even more responsible for those she did not love than for those she did; that she had no right to independent peace, but must throw herself continually into the midst of every turmoil, to prevent any further snapping of threads.

During the first few days of the holiday Gerda felt that she would never be able to carry it through to the end. The effort of comprehending Hellmut in her scheme – across to Willibald, then away downwards, always *downwards*, with a sudden heart-leap at the jerk – tried her strength too highly. This wiry dark man with the senselessly terrified eyes made a single, continuous demand upon her help; the whole of him appealed to her for protection

against despair. And here lay one of the chief causes of her vexation: she did not feel the despair to be properly his own. To allow oneself to be possessed by a neurosis which did not really wear the figure of one's difficulties seemed to Gerda gratuitously weak, and this was what she conceived to be Hellmut's state. His own private life (as far as it could be called private) was, she knew, averagely free from entanglements of every kind: he had enough money, he had a job and quite a good one. Why, then, this cold terror, this passion for self-extinction which walked beside him like a faithful animal? There was danger in him – danger for herself, for Willibald, who could scarcely ever be prevailed upon to discuss anything seriously. The danger persisted, irritatingly. It seemed to Gerda always present – even when all three were apparently in the lightest and gayest of moods, swimming or paddling the canoe or lying in the sun. For Hellmut could, and did, seem happy; his talk was more flowing and spontaneous than theirs and full of a fantastic humour. Gerda watched and listened and wondered – and feared. But she also resented this fear; and her resolution to sacrifice herself, if necessary, for Hellmut left room in her soul for a shrinking hatred, which stooped away from the plaintive terror that cried out to her for mercy.

II

Having put on a few more clothes, Willibald and Hellmut tunnelled slowly into the afternoon, unaccompanied by Gerda, who said she was tired and went to sleep under the shade of some firs.

Hellmut moved forward in rapid jerks, his very square, sharp-pointed shoulders looking as if they were joined on to the rest of his body by wire springs. Willibald, lagging a little behind as they walked, felt the tremendous stores of energy in the man, as if it were a stationary engine vibrating at a great speed. And he felt something of Gerda's fear, knowing that such energy must one day burst into violent action; but, unlike his sister, he would not examine his fear

or look at it for what it was, but thrust it away behind a curtain of care-free independence.

'Hellmut!' he said; 'a bit slower, please.'

Hellmut stopped and looked round. Willibald stopped too. They had rounded the belt of firs on the other side of which was their camping ground. Across a maze of sand and water they could see the beginnings of a village, the buildings very low but not huddled, as dark as the firs against the pale sand and the water which made patches of brilliant, cloudless sky on the earth. At the edge of the trees was a high, square stone and on it sat a young woman. She was dressed in the local costume, her chest and waist tightly constricted by a black alpaca bodice, with a row of buttons down the front, and an elaborate headdress with flapping sides, like a sort of sun-bonnet; on her knees was a closed wicker-basket. She looked like some kind of black bird perched on the stone. But her eyes were quite unbirdlike, colourless and dull, as if insensitive to the outside world. She sat crouched over the basket, brooding upon it, and her eyes looked without fear or curiosity at the two men.

'Good-day,' said Hellmut.

'Good-day,' answered the woman. Then, without altering her tone of voice, and as if she had been asked a question, she told them the name of the village.

The two men exchanged glances. 'We weren't going there,' said Willibald gently.

'So?' said the woman. 'I thought you might be.' She clasped her fingers over the basket. It seemed as if she were protecting something, sitting agelessly in calm collectedness by the side of the wood. Her eyelids rose and fell almost rhythmically, and the stiff linen wings at the sides of her head swung a little in the breeze. Her feet, in square-toed boots, were set closely side by side on the sandy path.

The two men did not wish to go on standing there, talking thus aimlessly, yet they did not move.

'Are you on your way somewhere?' asked Willibald.

The woman raised her head. 'I'm going to the railway station. I'm going to Elsterwerda, to be a nurse.'

'Are you leaving home for the first time?'

'Yes - oh, yes.' She spoke as if nothing could disturb her calm. Yet her being was not passive; it lived, evidently and frankly, from the momentary contact she was sustaining with the two men. Willibald, looking at Hellmut, could almost see the engine slowing down under the pressure of the woman's heavy, tranquil presence. Her body swelled out under the tight, metallic alpaca, which glittered in the sun like a kind of armour, with points of light on the buttons.

'We're used to it, in our part of the world,' she went on. 'Lots of us go out, all over the place, as nurses. We're said to be famous for it.' She spoke with naïve garrulity, as if slightly out of breath; and all the time her fingers bent over and stroked the basket on her knees.

Still Willibald and Hellmut did not move. They were bored, but fascinated and soothed at the same time, by this large and sumptuous bird. Hellmut's eyes were hardly open and his thin, dark face was covered with a look of sickly peace; a smile twisted one side of his mouth and his pointed body hung inside his clothes like the stick-bones of a scarecrow.

Willibald rejoiced, with bloodhound eyes and a hanging lower lip. The understanding of his heart was brief and perfunctory, but, in its way, violently sincere. He was capable of devoting himself seriously to an infinitely remote and uninteresting end. And now he observed the tranquillizing of Hellmut and, remembering Gerda, rejoiced.

Suddenly the woman moved her feet - shuffled them in the sand.

Hellmut opened his eyes, and the terror - unreal and masklike - returned. 'She's moving her feet,' he muttered in a staccato whisper.

Then: '*Alles gute in Elsterwerda,*' and '*Guten Tag,*' they said, and walked on.

'What you really want is a nurse like that,' said Willibald, after a moment.

'Even with you and Gerda?'

'Ech!' Willibald jerked his head like a chicken. 'What use are we in Berlin? When you get on your own . . .'

'You *have* been of great use.'

Their souls swung together, clashed and swung apart again – pendulums suspended from the zenith of a sky.

They returned home talking of practical things – of the length of time they could still remain in the Spreewald, of the autumn and winter in Berlin, of money, of lodging, of friends. They came upon Gerda awake, boiling water for tea.

She looked up at them, intending to make some vague, joking remark. But as she looked the afternoon turned to evening between their three faces, and her heart went heavy within her.

III

Later on it was discovered that there was no food left for supper. Someone must go to the village for it.

'Who's going to fetch food?' said Gerda. She did not care which of the two men went; she did not wish to have to go herself.

Hellmut and Willibald were doing something to the canoe. The former's shirt flickered with heroic whiteness against the darkening motionless water.

Suddenly Willibald sprang up. 'I'll go,' he said; then, more firmly, as if he had made a decision about something quite else: 'Yes, I'll go.' He went.

Hellmut remained by the canoe, tying some strings intricately inside the stern. Gerda came down to the water's edge and stood looking across the landscape, over which evening had settled as it were the soft white palm of a hand. Though there was no wind to blow them, the long grasses seemed all to be bent away from her; she took from the sight of them her final submission to a difficult

sacrifice. With Hellmut there at her feet, it would surely not be hard to discover what it was she must do – or if not do, at least witness and thus complete. It seemed to her as if the three of them were at the very centre of the world, where all was an endless tract of sand and grass and chains of water and fir trees, stretching round the earth in a belt of monotonously similar links, like a wallpaper in which the same tiny landscape is repeated again and again. And, in the centre of the centre, Hellmut, opening terrified eyes upon a visionless emptiness, outside which she, Gerda, was privileged to keep watch.

'Please give me your profile,' she cried suddenly; 'I can't bear your eyes. I'm sorry, but they frighten me. They make you yourself look afraid – as if you foresaw sudden death for us both.'

Hellmut's face went a dark red. Gerda looked at the thin cheek rigidly turned to her, and thought how beautiful he was, and wondered why he had never prompted her to the smallest impulse of physical love. Then she remembered his eyes.

'I know it,' he said, virulently. 'You have always made me feel it, without actually saying anything. Do you think I don't know that I'm a kind of Gorgon?' He laughed.

'Can you feel unoffended by what I said?'

'Perfectly well. I would accept anything from you.'

Yes, thought Gerda, that's just it. Yours is the attitude that I find so difficult to deal with. Nothing but take, take, take. And your gratitude is more intolerable than the rest.

Aloud, she said: 'You are prepared to accept too much. Everything you do is a kind of acceptance. You talk about sacrificing yourself – yes, you do; I've heard you and your friends talk that way – but all you do is to take. Any sacrifice you made would eventually take the form of accepting back with a concealed left hand what you gave with the right. There is no truth to be found in performances of that sort.'

Then, in spite of her request, he looked full at her once more; but his eyes were not wide open. 'However all that may be,' he said, 'the fact remains that you want to give – to help me. You always have wanted to, ever since I have known you. Do you remember that time, three years ago now, when I wanted to marry Else Reuss, and you saw what she was going to become like and prevented me? Why did you take all that trouble – and it *was* trouble and no mistake! – if you did not want to help me – to give me something?'

'I know,' answered Gerda unwillingly. 'But my wanting to give doesn't alter your wanting to take, and the unpleasantness of it.'

'How like a woman to argue like that! Women always want to eat their cake and have it, however emancipated they may pretend to be.'

'Well, and aren't you grateful that I did get you away from the Else? It wasn't for myself I wanted you. That you know.'

She spoke sharply and Hellmut blushed again. He opened his mouth, then shut it without speaking. The light had almost gone and the sky overhead was a very dark blue, without stars or moon, like an uncut jewel, paler at the edges. The water lay before them, a gloved hand on the pale sandy earth. In spite of the sultry air everything had a cold, dead look – the water, the grass, the firs – as if it were a landscape on the moon – on the very centre of a monotonous dead planet.

Suddenly Hellmut started and looked behind him into the firs. 'Someone is coming,' he said, sharply.

Gerda looked too. 'It wouldn't be Willibald yet,' she said, almost whispering.

They waited, their heads strained round, a slight tremulousness awake in their bodies. There was no sound. Yet, though Gerda had heard nothing, she felt as if the scene round her had altered – sprung into a consciousness that watched. She looked at the hair above the back of Hellmut's neck and her thoughts changed direction.

'What did you hear?' she asked.

'I don't know what it was. I thought I heard something among the trees.' Hellmut faced round and took his head between his hands. He muttered something.

'What d'you say?' Gerda bent forward.

Then Hellmut threw up his head and stared rigidly in front of him into the stark centre of the blue jewel, his lips stretched tight over his teeth – to Gerda again a contemplative warrior.

'Oh!' he cried in agony. 'I have stumbled forward into a dark day. I stumbled because I was so tired – so fearfully tired. You know what our work is like – how it wears one out. One's feet carry one where they like; one is too tired to care. And now they have landed me in a dark day. I don't care if I take everything you offer me, if I feel it might get me out.' He put up one hand, very strongly and beautifully made, some distance from his face and looked at it as if it were some kind of flag. Then he went on speaking in a quieter tone, but with the same accent of urgent pain.

'I suffer from visions of myself – myself looking on at scenes in which I long to take part and feel to be outside my range. The simple, slow ritual of lovers, in their recognition of each other's hands on the table in their room – coming and going month after month below the lamp which will in time light up their withering. And the silent, casual look, weighted by years of knowledge, but balanced away from solemnity by the wisdom of use. To achieve contacts which should be light without being trivial. . . . Do you see?'

'Perhaps. And the contacts which you do achieve – what about them?'

'They are either heavy or trivial. It is the besetting fault of us Germans: we can only manage the serious without losing our dignity. When we attempt the light, we forfeit respect. Else, for instance . . .' He dropped the hand over his bent knee.

'It isn't always in attempting lightness that we forfeit respect. Some of the things we have done in the last few years, in deadly seriousness and pretension to good, have been even worse. I'm only speaking of private relationships - I don't mean politics - they have been beyond criticism of that kind.' She laughed. 'But when you think of the numbers of people of our age who kill themselves every year in Berlin. . . . Do you ever think of them?'

Hellmut hesitated. Then: 'I nearly was one of them,' he said quietly.

Gerda subsided, taken aback by finding to be true what she had always suspected. 'When?'

'Three months ago.'

'Three months . . .?'

'Yes. And I wasn't alone in my decision. You remember Viebig and Sternberg?'

Gerda remembered. The case had made a small sensation in the Berlin press. Two students had shot one another by mutual arrangement; it was a case of a Suicide Pact, by no means an uncommon thing in the world into which she had grown up. She had known both of the young men slightly: she knew that Hellmut and Willibald had known them intimately. The whole thing had been a horrible shock at the time, but she had forgotten it quickly, having had so much of that kind of thing to forget in the years since the War. Now her interest and apprehension were revived, from a different angle. It had never occurred to her that Hellmut could have known any more about the affair than she had herself. Now she saw what a fool she had been not to suspect something of the kind, knowing Hellmut as she did. Then, suddenly, another part of her mind clicked into position, like a railway signal, and her heart leapt, and she felt sick.

She grasped Hellmut's arm, on the bare flesh, where the unbuttoned sleeve lay open. 'Willibald!' she said. 'Did Willibald have anything to do with it?'

Hellmut looked down at her hand holding his arm.

'You don't know that *I* had anything actually to do with it, so why do you ask about Willibald?'

'Tell me. Tell me.' She shook his arm.

He looked up at her under his brows, and she saw the whites of his eyes – as white as the sickly moon that was not in the sky above her, but all round her, forming the dead earth on which she sat. The sense of a watching presence, such as had followed Hellmut's whispered 'Someone is coming,' had quite left the air. It seemed to Gerda as if an invisible wall, which had closed silently in round them, had as silently retreated, having missed its opportunity. She let go of Hellmut's arm. He seemed to fall into a decision, his thin face less rigid than before.

'Very well, then. I'll tell you. As a matter of fact, we were both in it, Willibald and I. The idea of the Suicide Pact was originally mine – I mean, as between us four. We had been coming to it bit by bit. We were tired of everything, what with the difficulty of living and the horror of life as it seemed to us. We were all of us overworked, as you know. We saw too much of one another, talking and talking for hours on end every evening, instead of sleeping or resting our minds in some way. I think, really, that we *wanted* to make it worse for ourselves, out of hatred for happiness on such an earth as this; we *wanted* to be permanently overtired and hysterical; we *wanted* to bring ourselves to a desperate pass. And we succeeded, we –'

He paused suddenly, listening. 'Someone is coming,' he said again, in the same voice as before, like the refrain of a song.

Gerda listened too. The walls were back around her, pressing in. Yet she could hear nothing – not the smallest sound.

'Willibald!' she called softly.

No answer.

'Willibald!'

Slowly, in the silence, the walls receded again. There was nothing there – nothing but the whitish moon-sand,

and the dull water, and the spiked tops of the firs, black and motionless like an army frozen to death against the starless sky.

Suddenly Hellmut's voice cut down without warning and the silence fell apart before it. 'We brought ourselves to the point where we seemed to ourselves important enough to take a violent line and to achieve something by it. "Let us give ourselves," we said, "to fulfil the despair of our generation." In this way we proposed to exorcize it for others.' Pause. 'Those were days of great excitement - of intense joy, too, in a way. We concentrated upon each other, shutting out the rest of the world, as if we were engaged in some kind of mystery - as, of course, we were. Each time we saw one another we seemed to be haloed off from the crowd, whether in the street or in a restaurant or in a room. We had gone too far to question anything that we thought or did. Unreason would have been merely an irrelevant word (like "butter" or "toadstool") in our context; absurdity had long been abolished by the passionate sorrow which filled our hearts - for ourselves, for everyone else. We used to meet together at night, in Sternberg's rooms, to discuss it all and to arrange how and when it was to happen; even then, I at least knew that when it came to the point I should have difficulty in bringing it off. This was the one piece of realist thought which assailed me. But of course I also felt sure that I should surmount the difficulty in the end.'

Hellmut paused again. He seemed to have been talking to himself, and to have forgotten Gerda altogether. She, feeling this, put in words for her present existence.

'I want you to go on.'

So on he went, but still as if talking to himself.

'I remember well the meeting before what was to have been the final one. I met you in the Budapester Strasse about half-past six - do you remember? You said I looked ill and tried to get me to dine with you. And I refused, and you insisted, and I was rude. I remember that you

were unreal to me then – a tiresome ghost. I felt more real than anyone alive. . . . Well, we met in my rooms that night, to decide finally how it was to be done. We sat in a row on a sofa and two chairs – so as not to meet each other's eyes, I think – and we talked straight in front of us, out into the horrid little room, as if each one of us were alone. . . .’

He stopped, his voice trailing away, his body rigid. Though his profile was towards her, Gerda could see that he was staring wildly into a darker night than that which surrounded them.

Suddenly he began again, with a convulsion, evidently forcing himself to speak. ‘Viebig wanted poison. Sternberg agreed. Willibald said nothing. But I wouldn’t agree at any price. Ah! that would be awful, I thought. I saw my contorted body, twisted away out of life, the soul abandoned for ever to that terrible pain. I shouted my refusal. They seemed angry, but at last Viebig gave in and Sternberg suggested revolvers. We only had two between us – mine and Sternberg’s. I had mine locked up in Willibald’s room – I’ve forgotten why. I offered my room for the final meeting. We were to make ourselves drunk and then do the shooting. It was suggested that we should draw lots as to who should shoot another before himself; but Viebig and Sternberg said it wasn’t necessary – they would undertake the job. That gave me a shock. It had never occurred to me that any one of us would be willing to kill the other – even under the Pact. That shows you how far from reality I had come. For the first time I felt a specific fear of the whole thing. I looked at Viebig and Sternberg and saw them as murderers. And then, suddenly, I thought of what it all meant to me and the fear disappeared completely – for the moment. I thought of what had always been my vision of a self-imposed death: I called it “diving upwards.” The moment when you dive upwards would be as the moment when two bodies contract together for the first time in common knowledge of physical love. “I am not

sure . . . I am not sure even yet . . . I *am* sure." The thunder follows the lightning so closely that the two seem almost instantaneous – as when one watches from a distance a man chopping a tree and hears the sound just after one has seen the axe meet the trunk.

Gerda's eyes looked at Hellmut with the intensity of longed-for discovery. "Common knowledge of love," she repeated. 'Have you had that? Have you?'

He looked at her, his eyes almost closed. 'Oh, yes,' he said, as if indifferently. The softness of his tone sounded false – a *quasi piano*.

'When? Where?'

Hellmut's eyes opened again, giving to him that look of assumed fear. 'I shall not tell you.'

Gerda hesitated a moment and then said, as if the words were being forced out of her against her will: 'You would never have it with me.' She had not wanted to say it; but all that he had told her had thrust weapons into her hands and urged her to use them like this – pointlessly.

Hellmut's body quivered, as under an electric shock, and went awry under the dark night – became a stiff, pale blot on the colourless earth.

'That is unnecessary – terrible,' he exclaimed, mispronouncing the words like one who speaks with his mouth full of food.

For a moment they remained flung back, like two arrows stuck into the ground and leaning away from one another; their taut quivering made concentric rings in the air.

Little by little the arrows quivered to rest; the air-rings shut into a centre – petals closing upon themselves. The souls of Hellmut and Gerda were at rest; they were healed, could rise up again and take their several ways. But they had dealt mutual blows and were damaged: what now remained to be said between them must take the form of a commentary long after the event; as when old people discuss the loves of their youth.

'Finish the rest,' said Gerda.

'That night, when the others had gone, I heard the bell ring. It was Willibald. He had pretended to the others that he had gone home and had then come back by another way. The moment I saw his face I knew what he had come for. I've never seen another pair of eyes like his, which can *droop purposefully*. I knew he had come to make me do something. He had. He wanted me to give it all up, together with him. I think the readiness of the other two to do the shooting had given him as much of a shock as it had given me. At first I wouldn't listen; but he persisted and ended by making me feel a fool. I broke down and cried. The fire in the room had gone out and it had got very cold. The air was stale with tobacco. I noticed all this and felt very miserable; but it was like my former misery turned inside out: it did not make me feel like killing myself. Willibald was quite hard and self-possessed – or appeared to be. He took no notice when I wept – turned his head away from me. But I knew he did not despise me for it.' Pause. 'So I gave in. When the night came on which it was to happen, Willibald came and took me to your house – you remember? – and we stayed there until the early morning. Then we found that Viebig and Sternberg had done it without us. But they had not given us away first – by a letter or anything. That made us ashamed. I have been able to think of nothing ever since. All my despair came rushing back, directly the danger was over, and has stayed with me.'

'And with Willibald?' Gerda's voice sounded like a glass cracking.

'I don't know.' The words dropped like stones. 'He won't speak of the affair at all. I think he is afraid. Anyhow he won't mention it – flies into a temper if I try to bring up the subject which obsesses me. I know that he brought me with him here to prevent me from killing myself; I suppose he knew that was about all he could prevent – if that.'

He stopped and had evidently reached an end. He looked

as if he would never move from where he sat, his dark head springing from the white shirt like a piece of the night.

Gerda watched him and tried to assemble the scattered pieces of her early resolution. To help – to sacrifice herself: this she had sworn to do. But now that the opportunity had become urgent and clearly defined, she felt more futile than ever. What to say, what to do? 'Morbid feelings are cured by fresh air, exercise, and sunlight.' This was the sort of thing brisk persons said, was it not? But was it true? Here was a man, living a life *in corpore sano*, bathing and paddling a canoe and lying in the sun and resting from work. He had escaped from the close, shut-up, student life. Had it changed his mind?

She was about to speak, to take this line with him; but, before she could do so, her heart told her, in accents that she recognized as authentic, that what she would say was wasteful and irrelevant, that neither physical exercise nor an atmosphere of *No Nonsense* nor anything else whatever could serve to prevent or cure despair in a soul to which it had gone, blindly, like a baby to a woman's breast.

Leaning forward, she stared into his face. Though it was so very dark, yet she could see the glaring whites of his eyes and the black pupils, the pale mouth drawn tight over the teeth. She could see that the expression was not willingly his own, that it somehow did not belong to him: he was given over to a worship beyond his own control, of a god which he did not rightly know. He had told her the truth, as far as he was able; but there was something more – something that made her body recoil from his, with the same quality of terror which she could see in his eyes. What she had said to him – that he would never know love with her – was a truth the intensity of which had forced her to proclaim it. It might be totally irrelevant, insulting, lowering to herself; but she had had to say it, almost as if it had been necessary to protect herself against a bodily assault. And so her desire to help this man was defeated by a repulsion which she despised and could not wholly

explain, but which paralysed the fountain of useful sympathy and influence she might otherwise have made to play.

Suddenly he looked at her in quite an ordinary fashion. 'You're an inquisitive woman,' he said.

'Yes, but not *merely* inquisitive.'

And this was all that her expression of sympathy came to.

There was a sound of footsteps in the grass, and Willibald's tall figure appeared quite near them, his grotesque forehead shining bulbously as if by its own light. Under his arm was a packet of food for their supper.

Later, they stretched themselves in a row hard by the fir plantation. Lying side by side they talked desultorily, preparing for sleep.

'Twice we thought we heard you coming back,' said Gerda to Willibald; 'but it was a false alarm.'

'There *was* someone, though, I'm sure,' said Hellmut, from beyond Willibald.

Gerda did not reply to this.

After a long pause Willibald said softly: 'Gerda, are you awake?'

He was answered by a little breeze, which pierced the firs behind him with a murmur. He slept. The darkness seemed to deepen, now that all the voices were still; it was as though a lamp beneath the horizon had been turned down and now burnt low, like a sullen protection.

The far sound of a cornet floated steadily from the village over the three sleepers, playing a slow tune.

IV

All three awoke very early, looked at their watches, turned over and went to sleep again.

Soon after eight Willibald awoke for the second time. He sat up and looked down on either side of him. On the right Gerda still slept, with her arm thrown across her eyes; on the left was an empty space where Hellmut had been. 'He has gone to bathe,' thought Willibald and stood up. 'Hellmut!' he shouted.

At the sudden sound Gerda sprang up with a muttered cry of words. Then she became fully awake. 'What's the matter?' she said, beginning to fiddle with her thick obstinate hair.

Willibald looked back at her, with the bright yellow sun streaming on to her face from over the tops of the firs. 'Hellmut's disappeared,' he said. 'I thought I heard him answer my shout from far away, but it may only have been you.'

'I?'

'Yes - you woke up with a jump and cried out.'

'Did I? Well, shout again and see what happens.'

'Hellmut! Where have you got to?'

This time there was certainly no answer.

'Here's the canoe, so he can't have gone in it,' said Willibald.

It was Gerda who said: 'Never mind. He'll come back when he wants to.'

By eleven o'clock the air was even hotter than on the preceding day. There was no breeze at all; the sun glared off the water and the bleached sand: it was stifling. Gerda and Willibald bathed lazily and wondered why Hellmut did not return. Once they shouted again, this time in concert; but there was no answer. They inquired of a passing peasant, but he shook his head. Gerda averred that he had not understood what they said. Even after her conversation with Hellmut she did not feel apprehensive, simply because Willibald appeared not to be so. But the joy of life had left her; she felt defeated - an egg-shell, whole to the eyes of others, but empty to herself. She had failed to carry out her principle on the one opportunity which had presented itself. It was in her mind to tell her brother of her knowledge, chiefly from curiosity to see how he would take it, but partly from an obscure sense that if she could make him face the matter she might shelve some of the responsibility which she felt towards Hellmut.

'Willi,' she said, 'I'm worried about Hellmut. You see . . . I know about it all.'

Willibald looked at her, then away again. 'Very well. You know. There's nothing to worry about.'

Gerda was amazed at his indifference. She did not know what more to say. Then Willibald spoke again.

'We may as well go and look for him. He can't be far off.' He spoke as if Hellmut were a thimble that had been dropped among the grass.

Suddenly Gerda's mind snapped into a definite point. She did not see why Willibald should not be forced to discuss the subject that tormented her.

'Wait a minute,' she said. 'You always have wanted to put aside words in favour of acts. Generally, you may be right: I don't know. But now I want you to talk to me.'

Then Willibald flew at her in one of his sudden rages, his small blue eyes puffy and violent, one large vein swelling down the centre of his ridiculous forehead.

'What's the good of talking? If you're afraid that he's gone to do away with himself, I should have thought you'd have wanted action. And why discuss what's over and done with, anyhow? I hate that sort of maundering on, turning over rubbish. Just because you and Hellmut spent hours last night doing it, there's no reason why I should give in to your craving.'

Gerda was prepared for this: she always knew when one of her brother's sudden bursts of temper was due to occur. She also knew how transitory they always were. Looking calmly at him she recognized the man who might for a moment have agreed to kill himself. She knew him for a fundamentally sane character, with a realist's point of view; but it was easy to forget the sudden violent emotions, which stood away from the rest of his soul, entering it unexpectedly with a swirl of wind. He was afraid of them himself and would not acknowledge them, even to her. He was indeed one of those in whom a healthy life may completely expunge the thoughts which bring despair.

The tragic life had no permanent meaning for him; it could only be given a spurious one by artificial stimulation (not necessarily from without). So Gerda looked calmly at him, from underneath her eyelids, and the vein in his forehead subsided.

‘What is it you want to know?’ he said.

‘I want to know: Have you ever, in your mind, gone back on the decision which kept you and Hellmut out of that house in the Dützow Strasse, the night when Viebig and Sternberg shot themselves? Have you?’

It seemed to Gerda that Willibald’s face drooped suddenly with relief – a triumphant relief, as though he had just passed through some danger.

‘Is that *all* you want to know?’ he asked.

Gerda hesitated, because of the look on his face. Then she nodded.

‘No, then, never,’ he answered her. ‘And never shall,’ he added.

Turning simultaneously from one another they looked across the water to the tower; its glassless windows were black as ink against the glaring concrete walls. It gave Gerda an idea.

‘Let’s go up the tower and look out for him,’ she said.

‘All right, but we shall have to go in the canoe. It would take ages to get round by land.’

They paddled quickly across the still water, which glittered on the paddles. As they came nearer to the opposite bank the tower seemed to rise higher and higher. It was, indeed, quite a high tower. Pulling the canoe on to the sand they ran up on to the fir-covered hillock behind the tower, where the doorway was. As they went in, a sudden wave of heat broke over Gerda’s head and with it a strong smell of resin from the firs.

Gerda went first up the stairs. The interior of the tower was very skilfully constructed, two complete spiral staircases running one above the other round the walls; there was no communication between them except at the bottom

and on a gallery which ran round the top of the tower, outside under the jutting edges of the little dome. Gerda and Willibald were on the lower of the two staircases.

Gerda was nearly at the top when she stopped, gave a cry and pointed across the well of the staircase. Willibald ran up close behind her and looked in the direction of her pointing. On the opposite side of the tower, and on the higher staircase, Hellmut was standing motionless, naked save for his white bathing-drawers. His face was rigid and staring; his dusky body speckled with light from the many windows, he looked like an angry faun. In the overpowering, resinous silence a thin cloud came over the sun, darkening the whole of Hellmut's body into a leaden statue against the concrete wall; then the sun appeared and blotched the body again in great washes from chin to hip, and lower across the thighs. This motion on the still figure gave it the semblance of death.

'Hellmut!' Willibald spoke low but clearly, as one who should seek to arouse a sleeper.

But Hellmut continued to stare at Gerda without answering, his face full of rage and hatred.

And she, for her part, would have wished to speak some word to him. But none rose to her lips; her soul had shut up shop. She looked fixedly back into the eyes which she hated, and tried to mitigate their hatred and her own.

Suddenly Hellmut ran up a few steps and stopped again under one of the windows. Then he climbed on to the sill, with a swift, resilient movement, not using his hands to assist him. His tall figure filled the embrasure, blotting out the brilliant sky with a thick, vivid tracery of darkness. He flung his arms up behind him, into the air outside the tower; then, like a dancer leaping from the wings on to the stage, he dived upwards, out into the sky.

Gerda screamed briefly and covered her mouth with the back of her hand. Her second thought was: 'My God! Willibald will follow him.' She turned, but what she saw was her brother running down the steps three at a time

and bumping violently against the walls in his haste. The figure was that of one who rushes to a rescue.

Gerda hesitated; then, instead of following Willibald, she collected herself and mounting the stairs very slowly, peeped out of one of the narrow windows, her bushy hair catching in the rough concrete.

Far below her Hellmut lay in the sun, his head crowned by water. The crown was wide, long and irregular in shape, and the head which had once made rings in the night air now made them in the water – for a crown. The face, which was turned towards Gerda, stared unflinchingly up into the blinding sky, and presented the mask of a determined and rather grasping, but terrified, young man.

Willibald came running down the slope, knelt and bent over the body, hiding it from Gerda's sight.

Then she withdrew her head and slowly, picking her way on each step, as if descending a regal staircase towards an expectant throng, she left the tower.

*Frost in April*¹

BY MALACHI WHITAKER

THE farm of Harfy Inn Corner stood high and alone on a moorland shoulder. It faced west. On its south side rose an untidy stone shed, called the mistal, in which twenty cows were housed, and behind it was a grey-green, neglected garden, where coarse grass grew in uneven clumps. Just in front of the house, a stony road ran, twisting to the right within sighting distance, continuing downhill until it found a sanctuary of trees, and there, apparently, vanishing. To the left, it ran an unseen distance of three miles, up and down the inhospitable shoulder, hedged with windblown thorns and black, forgotten brambles, past only Joyts and Pennypot – farms a field's length from the lane – until it joined the main road for Farchester at Starting Post.

The wife of the farmer was a little woman, with a red tight-drawn skin, and great brown terrified eyes. She started in a painful way at any sound from the outside world, yet she always spoke loudly, repeating what she said two, and sometimes three times. 'You gi' me a fright, I say, you gi' me a fright.' The jerky ticking of the octagonal wall clock was the only noise she seemed really to understand, and to draw comfort from. She would stare at the clock when in any predicament, all the time softly stroking the sheepskin rug which was tied on the back of a wooden chair. She seemed to be subject to some fear which never left her, and which solitude increased slowly but inevitably.

She had six great, broad sons, inarticulate like the animals

¹ From *Frost in April*, by Malachi Whitaker, by permission of Messrs. Jonathan Cape, Ltd.

they tended, and after them, a daughter. Tildy, short for Matilda, had been a pretty baby, with a crown of tangled bronze curls, very hard to tend. She had small, oblique blue eyes, and a voice as clear as a thrush's. But she had very little to say, keeping her voice only to sing with. She inherited the tight-drawn, red skin of her mother, rough to the touch and scaly; yet she had some hidden charm that drew a second glance. Occasionally, the moorland wind hurt her eyes, making them red and sore, and she would look away when speaking to anybody.

Tom Morris, the father, appeared to be the only normal member of the family. He was a neat man, with straw-coloured hair and moustache, a very pleasing tenor voice, and a fondness for breeding canaries. He sang in the chapel choir, and had a religious bias. Yet, seeing him in the farm kitchen, humming to himself as he wiped his hands on the soiled towel near the sink where the pump was, you might have found in him an answer to a strange riddle. He loved his canaries, and his singing practice, and made a great show of working hard at the farm; but if there was any labour that could be put on to another's shoulders, he would contrive to do it in a way that was not, at first glance, discernible.

The six sons, uncouth lads, grew up into strong, heavy men. As soon as they were of an age, they married and left home, with just enough knowledge and ambition to be labouring hinds for other men. They seemed eager to leave the farm in which they were born and reared, and never returned even so much as for a visit at Christmas, or Easter, or other festival. If they had cared for their baby sister, they never showed it, but sometimes the little girl and her mother would set off and call on the nearest ones, and play with their sturdy children, and turn back home as darkness fell.

The youngest son had done well for himself. He had married an idiot girl whose grandmother had died and left her £500 and a house of furniture. His brothers envied him,

because he need only work for two or three days a week. But the idiot girl proved prolific, and with a steadily increasing flock of children, he found that in spite of his wife's wealth, he would have to look for regular work. Everybody in the district was well supplied, so with a sinking heart he returned to work for his father. Marriage and money had a little armed him, and while his father offered him the barest pittance for wage, he on his part stipulated that he should not arrive at the farm before six o'clock, until after the morning milking was over, and the milk in the cans all ready to take to the station. He did not often work near the house.

With the sons men and away, and the girl now seventeen, life should have been easier for Mrs. Morris; but it never was. The house was a large one. There was an unused parlour, stuffy with inherited lumber, and earth-smelling from the green plants which entirely filled the small window space. There was a large living-kitchen, the floor of which constantly echoed to the clatter of iron-rimmed footwear. There were stone-floored sculleries, pantries and passages, all to scrub interminably, besides the upstairs rooms, and the noisy, voracious, dirt-making birds in the attic. The house was always spotless, the result of unceasing labour. The farm mistress's little leisure was spent in mending torn clothing, seated in a chair beneath the great paraffin lamp which hung from the centre of the dark ceiling.

Again, the poultry were spread far and wide, and the two women had it all to tend. The poultry houses were in sheltered corners of the various fields, and it was a long way from one to another. Some of the hens were kept near to the house, and were continually squawking and flying heavily from under impatient feet into the bare branches of the few meagre trees, then back to the ground. The cows were shut up from October to May, and their gentle lowing, deep and true as an organ note, instead of breaking the silence, seemed to make it more profound.

Work at the farm began early and ended late. Winter

was a cruel time. Sometimes, as Tildy carried the forty great pails of water from the well in the road to the shippen, two for each cow, the child would pause, and, pressing her numbed hands into her armpits, would look around her at the frozen hill-tops, and unknown desires would burst into bloom in her thin bosom, only to die as she heard her father's voice asking how much longer she was going to stand there 'gapin' at nowt.' The farmer far preferred sitting milking, with his head against the warm flanks of Bess or Beauty, to carrying the water in.*

The dapper little farmer was proud of his daughter's capacity for work, and also of her sweet, clear voice. As soon as she was old enough, she went with him into the chapel choir, and even two or three nights a week to practise singing. The long walk to Starting Post and back home, they reckoned as nothing – indeed, they never thought of it, or dreamed of putting off a practice, no matter how bad the weather. This was innocent joy. Meantime, the mother would sit listening to the tock, tick-tock of the wall clock, her eyes wide with fear, her ears alert for alien sound. But her life was set, planned for her by her husband, and she dared not deviate from his ways. He was a miser.

At seventeen, Tildy's rebel curls had fallen into an orderly beauty. Her eyes were much stronger, and she could now, if she wished, stare back into other eyes, but the force of habit was too strong in her, and usually she looked away when addressing anybody, and appeared to be thinking of other things. Her mouth had a droop to it; she suffered much from backache, yet she did not complain, except very rarely to her mother. When she felt worse than usual, her mother would go out into the howling wind, rain, or bitter frost of the winter's dawn, and carry the heavy pails of water to the patient cattle, while her father sat snug and warm behind a cow and sang, 'Come unto Me, all ye that labour,' in a voice sweet enough to draw tears from the eyes of the devil himself.

It would have been easy for him to have had water laid

on from the well to the byre, he was always going to do it, but he could not bear to spend the money. He grudged the coal on the fire, the butter on the bread. He grudged his son the few shillings he paid him, and never gave his daughter a penny. Yet he was a very pleasant man to talk to. When his friends came to look at his canaries, they envied his home, his birds, his cattle, his poultry. They knew he was close, yet they envied him even for that, saying he would have a tidy bit laid by. Before their eyes, Tildy mixed food for the poultry, or cleaned the byre, or swilled out the yard, clad in a thick grey frock, with a little fringed shawl tied over her hair; singing, though her hands were red and swollen.

In the summer of her nineteenth year, after the haymaking was over and done with, she met Irving Barr, and they fell in love; not so much in love as in ecstasy. He was tall, over a foot higher than she was, with a clear, tanned skin under which the blood flowed easily. He, too, had blue eyes, but they were large and full, and his lips and nostrils were clear cut as a statue's. His hands were smooth, strong and small; they did not look like a farmer's hands. He had come with his newly widowed mother from over the hills by Adderthwaite, to an easier farm near Starting Post, known as Jonah's Eye. They were having everything up to date at Jonah's Eye, even a bathroom, unknown luxury. He was twenty, and unaware of his own good looks, and the effect they had on the village girls.

First, he heard Tildy's voice in the choir. She was singing a solo. From under an unfashionable hat her curls cascaded. She was looking into a dusty corner of the chapel as though she saw an angel there, and her clear voice broke through her lips like a singing spring. Not a muscle of the young man's face moved, yet at that moment, he had determined that only this girl should be his wife. As she finished singing, she brought her glance to his, and for some seconds their looks embraced in a shaft of summer sunlight.

He tried hard to become acquainted with her, but by some

means her father always managed to put him off. Mr. Morris would talk affably with him, and contrive to send Tildy home before he had a chance to say one word to her. He was baffled by the unseen barrier. There was no reason for it. Here was a man with a daughter, here was a young man who wanted in a right and proper way to come courting that daughter. Yet Mr. Morris smiled and chatted, even invited him to see the canaries, but always saw to it that Tildy had no opportunity of talking to him. It was simple enough to other people. Tom Morris did not want to part with his hard-working daughter.

One night, as she was going to bed in her little room over the front passage, the girl heard a low, sweet whistle. She flushed, and pulling on her dress, leaned out of the window. To the still figure beneath her in the garden, she whispered, 'Hush! Oh, please, please be quiet, father'll hear you!'

For answer, the young man looked up at her earnestly, and saying 'Good night' in low tones, he turned from her, strode through the neglected garden, vaulted the wall, and was gone. She watched him as long as she could see him in the dusk, and as she climbed into her bed, she hid her smiling face in her hands and hoped she would dream about him.

Sometimes he came to wish her good night, and sometimes he did not. She would stand in her room, not daring to undress until there was no further likelihood of his coming. They grew to exchanging a word or two, then they talked; the fear of being found out adding a delicious zest to their conversations. One night, he persuaded her to climb out of the window, and they spent a fearful yet happy half-hour walking up and down the field.

'Why can't I come for you in the evenings, and take you out?' he asked. 'There's no reason why you shouldn't come.'

'Perhaps if you asked father, he'd let me,' she suggested.

The following Sunday, the young man asked the older one if he could come courting Tildy.

'I'm afraid my girl's too young,' he answered, with a deprecating smile. ('She's only seventeen.'

'Nineteen,' corrected the young man, unguardedly.

'Seventeen,' answered the father coldly, giving him a deadly smile. 'Somebody must have been informing you wrong.' And he would not say any more.

'It's no use, Tildy,' Irving said, as they walked the lane late that night. 'He thinks you're too young.'

'Don't vex him,' she said imploringly; and turned back to go home.

Winter put an end to many of their meetings, but their love grew steadily. The young man went to chapel each Sunday, and there they were able to steal glances at one another, all through the long service. Always on Sunday nights, unless snow was on the ground, and his footmarks could be seen, he came to kiss her cold, frightened lips, and to wish her good night. At times he grew wildly angry because of her father; he wanted to climb up into her little room.

'Oh no!' she cried, because she was terrified—not afraid of him, but afraid that he should see the ill-furnished little place, with its wooden chest in place of dressing-table, and tin box in place of chair – 'You mustn't say you'll come in, or I'll never open the window to you again!'

'Well, let me kiss the pillow where you put your head,' he said, and he would not be content until she brought her pillow for him to kiss.

One evening in spring, the girl asked her mother if she could go out. The father was away, and they did not expect him back until late. Her mother stared at her, and all at once put a trembling hand on her arm. She said, 'Go out, Tildy, I say go out, Tildy, before he comes. But get back before he comes back, or else –' She did not say or else what, but Tildy knew.

She met Irving as they had arranged. They walked over the far hill and up on to the moors, where last year's heather crackled beneath their feet. They talked and kissed as they

walked, and could not bear to turn their footsteps homeward but at last they had to do so.

'I shall come back again to kiss you good night, and to see that everything's all right,' he said, as they parted not too near the house.

When she entered the kitchen, pretty and flushed and warm, her father was waiting for her. He had his hat on, and there was a stick laid across his knee. In the opposite doorway, her mother was standing holding her left hand up to her cheek. The girl hung back, her face paling.

'Come here, Tildy,' said her father, softly smiling; and still smiling, he pinioned her hands behind her back and beat her until she screamed. Half his blows fell on the girl, and half on her mother.

When the girl went up to her room, she opened the window wide. Then she lay down on her bed, wiping away her tears with a rough cotton handkerchief. She did not get up when she heard a low whistle, nor was she afraid when her lover came and gently kissed her wet eyelids.

Hay-time came round again. The lovers, each busy throughout the day, thought constantly of one another. He bought her a little ring with a blue stone in it, and she wore it all night long. He bought her, too, a wedding ring, but she could think of no safe place to hide it, and wore it tied round her middle with a piece of string. 'You'll soon be wearing it,' he told her confidently. 'As soon as you're twenty-one - and perhaps before that - we're going to be married. I don't care how soon.'

'And neither do I!' she answered joyfully. 'I don't care, whatever happens.'

There was just one thing they had forgotten. In late summer, he caught a chill. A night passed, and he did not come; then two nights, three, four, five; and on the sixth, she heard from her father that he was dead.

Tom Morris had come in and sat down at the table. He had seemed full of inward pleasure about something. He began to eat, and to talk to the womenfolk. 'Yes,' he said,

young Barr's dead. His mother's telling everybody that he's been out night after night wi' some lass or other, and caught his death of pneumonia.'

Tildy watched the movement of her father's jaw as he chewed his food and told the tale of her lover's death, with malice, with amusement. How much did he know as he told it? She rose abruptly from the table, and went upstairs into her room. She stood near the window, looking out into the pale-blue sky. There was a pink reflection from the sunset. She did not see it. She had not yet realized the full meaning of her father's words, only that something dreadful, unspeakable, had happened to her.

She heard the sound of footsteps, and turned blindly to hold the door. She was too late; her mother had crept into the room. She put her hand on her daughter's hair, and whispered: 'Don't take on, Tildy, I say, don't take on.'

The girl did not move. She said, with difficulty: 'Does father say he's dead?'

Her mother did not answer; only stroked the girl's hair. 'Is it true? Have *you* heard?' she asked sharply, watching her mother's eyes.

The older woman nodded. 'I've known sin' dinner-time,' she said.

The girl shook off her mother's hand.

A week later, Tom Morris again went away. He had whistled and sung all the week long, and did not appear to have a care in the world. As soon as he was gone, the girl put on a long black coat of her mother's. It had great pouched sleeves, and much material in it, and would have looked a caricature of a coat on anybody less scared and sad. Then she put on a black hat of her own.

'I'm going, Mother,' she said.

Her mother was manifestly afraid. 'I s'll be that uneasy until you come back,' she said. 'Promise me, Tildy, you won't do anything rash. I wish I could come with you.'

'Oh, Mother, do come! Lock up and come. I daren't go without you. Put on your black shawl. We'll hurry back as

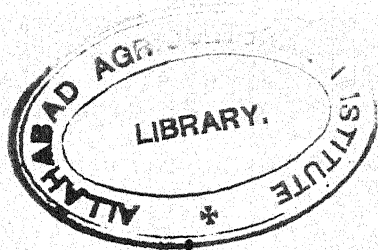
soon as we've seen it. If you're not with me, I don't know what'll happen.'

She had gathered a few late wild flowers, and, holding these tenderly in her hand, the girl went with her mother to the graveyard, and saw her lover's grave. Her mother looked about to see that nobody was near as she hid her few blossoms close to the earth, beneath the conventional hot-house wreaths, which were already withering. The pale yellow October sun, about to vanish behind a cloud, threw its last beams on the two women, who hurried through their sad task as if they were thieves at work. Then they stood up, and with their faces hidden, turned towards home.

As they entered the yard, nothing was changed. The hens still flew heavily and protestingly into the branches at their approach; then out again. A cow lowed; then another, and another; and again the silence was deeper.

Tildy changed into her grey dress, tied the little fringed shawl over her head, and made the first of her trips from the well to the byre. As she carried the heavy buckets, she slowly lifted her gaze from the stony path beneath her feet until it rested among the stars.

She had not before realized that one could see so far.



The Saint

BY ANTONIA WHITE

CHILDREN, as you know, are supposed to have a special power of discerning saints. A great many years ago, when I was a child at a convent school, a number of us were certain that we had divined one in our very midst.

The name of the saint was Mother Lucilla Ryan. She was about thirty years old, very beautiful in a way that was both spiritual and witty, and she was dying of consumption.

We came back from our long summer holidays to find that the consumption, which for months had moved stealthily, almost invisibly, had begun to gallop. It was too late to send her abroad to the Order's sanatorium at Montreux. She was to die here in the community infirmary, among her own friends.

Mother Lucilla had been in direct charge of the Junior School, so that we felt her to be peculiarly *our* saint. The tiny notes she scribbled us now and then, exquisitely written notes pencilled on scraps of squared paper torn from an exercise book, we slipped reverently into our missals, convinced that one day they would be sought-after relics. Charlotte, I remember, even went so far as to print on hers 'Actual writing of the Blessed Lucilla Ryan.' We were amazed at her boldness, but we secretly felt that it would be justified.

I think we were just a little disappointed that Mother Lucilla was dying in her bed and not at the stake. Canonization, we knew, was a long and tedious process, and we wanted quick results. Martyrdom, as everyone knows, is the royal road to sainthood and we would have trusted

Mother Lucilla under any torture. Her bravery, indeed, was almost legendary. Some of the Senior School could remember how she had caught her finger in the see-saw one day during recreation. Without so much as a grimace, she had folded her wounded hand in her sleeve and stood for the rest of the hour, directing games as usual, with that odd, delicate smile of hers. Not until she had marshalled the children back indoors did anyone know that the top half of one finger had been torn right away.

It can never be an easy task to succeed a saint, especially in the critical eyes of twenty small girls, but few people could have failed more conspicuously than poor Mother MacDowell. There was nothing to appeal to the most charitable imagination about our new mistress. To begin with, she was very plain; small and stocky, with a red hard-bitten face and thick, refracting glasses. Through these amazing glasses, her small dull eyes appeared enormous, like the eyes of an insect. Somehow or other we knew that her father had gone blind and that her parents had made her spend an hour every day alone in the dark, so that if she too were to go blind she would be less helpless. Had we heard such a story about Mother Lucilla, it would be one more legend of her saintly patience. But it was part of the general unfortunateness of Mother MacDowell that everything that happened to her should seem dull, common, and even rather ridiculous. The very tasks she was given by the community seemed to be chosen to display her at her worst. Besides looking after us, she was mistress of needlework for the whole school, though, even with her glasses, she could hardly see to thread a needle. Her red hands, speckled with pricks, looked clumsier than ever, moving stiffly and painfully over the gauzy linen we were embroidering for altar cloths. Everything about her was unromantic. Her habit was the shabbiest in the convent. Her rosary was broken in three places and mended with wire. She suffered from titanic colds that made her look plainer than ever. And, to crown all, her Christian name was Keziah.

We were prepared to receive her with a cold dislike, but there was something about Mother MacDowell's attitude to our adored Mother Lucilla that ripened the dislike into hostility. I don't mean that she ever said anything uncharitable about Mother Lucilla or that she did not encourage us to pray for her. But the sight of any extravagant devotion, and, above all, any mention of the word 'saint,' roused her to unwonted anger.

The four o'clock recreation, when we did not play games, but sat about with our mistress, munching thick slices of bread and jam, was always a time for discussion. I am afraid it was also a favourite time for baiting Mother MacDowell. One afternoon, as we sat round her under the plane tree on the dusty, stony, Junior School playground, Charlotte said, raising innocent eyes:

'Mother MacDowell, do you think Mother Lucilla is a saint?'

'It is not for us to say who are saints and who are not. That is for God to declare, through the mouth of the Church,' said Mother MacDowell piously.

'But don't you think Mother Lucilla's awfully holy?' persisted Charlotte, who had been a great favourite of Mother Lucilla's, if saints can be said to have favourites.

'Only God can know that. We all need infinite mercy. No doubt we shall all have a great many surprises at the Last Day.'

We looked at each other. The five-minute bell rang.

'Come along, Charlotte, eat your bread and jam. You haven't even begun it,' said Mother MacDowell sharply.

'I don't want it,' said Charlotte self-consciously.

'Don't be absurd, child. Be thankful to the dear Lord who sent it to you and eat up your good food.'

'But - Mother -' Charlotte wriggled.

'Well, child?'

'I wanted to do a penance for Mother Lucilla. You said we all needed prayers. So I thought I'd give up my *gouter* for her.'

We gave Charlotte admiring glances. None of us had thought of doing that.

'God does not want penances of that sort,' said Mother MacDowell very decidedly. 'He would far rather that, instead of showing off like that, you made an act of humility and ate your *goutier* like the others. That would be a real penance.'

Charlotte turned crimson and began to eat her bread in small, martyred bites. Although we could not resist a faint pang of pleasure in seeing her scolded off, the general feeling was that Mother MacDowell had showed a very mean spirit. A week later, Mother Lucilla died. As a great privilege, we were allowed to see her as she lay among the lilies in the Lady Chapel that had once been a ballroom and that still had gilt garlands of leaves and little violins on the walls. We filed round the bier on tiptoe, in our black veils and gloves, passing from hand to hand the heavy silver *asperges* and clumsily sprinkling drops of holy water on Mother Lucilla's black habit, that had become sculptured and unreal like a statue's robe. Not one of us doubted, as we looked at her lying there, pale as wax, and still smiling as if she had just been told some holy secret, that we were looking at a saint.

The morning she was buried they dressed us in the white serge uniforms that we wore only on big feast days. Carrying candles that burnt with a faint, nearly invisible flame in the May sunlight, the whole school passed in long ranks under the alley of limes that led to the nuns' cemetery. At the graveside we formed a hollow square, with the younger ones in the centre. Mother Lucilla's four tall brothers, who were all officers in the Irish Guards, carried the coffin; the little boys from the Poor School, transformed into a choir with white surplices, chirped the 'De Profundis' like so many sparrows. We peered with respectful curiosity into the hollow grave. It was lined with spruce boughs that had a solemn, unforgettable smell. Father Kelly was praying, in his rich voice that sounded splendid out of doors, that all

the angels might come to meet her at the doors of heaven; the four tall brothers were paying out the bands of the deal coffin that looked like a soldier's, when the wonderful thing happened. As the nuns intoned the Amen, a white butterfly flew up out of the grave, hung for a minute so that we could all see it, then spiralled away, with a flight as purposeful as a bird's, right up into the blue air.

We looked round curiously. Some of the nuns were gazing up after the butterfly. Mother MacDowell, I noticed, was not one of these. Her red face was bowed and impassive, though the sun danced furiously in her spectacles. But Reverend Mother, who had been weeping a little, lifted her head, and looking straight at the Junior School, gave us a smile that was positively triumphant. Almost giddy with excitement and happiness, we smiled back. It was a Sign, if ever there was one.

We were rather subdued for the rest of the day. Even poor Mother MacDowell did not find us quite so impossible as usual. At tea-time recreation we gathered round her in quite a friendly way, while the conversation turned quite naturally on saints. But to-day we were careful to mention no names.

Charlotte, sitting astride a branch of the plane tree, bent down to ask, very politely:

'How long does it take for a saint to get canonized?'

'Many years, my dear child - centuries sometimes.'

'Like the English martyrs,' put in Laura. 'They've only just been done, haven't they, Mother?'

There was a murmur of disappointment. Then someone had a bright thought.

'But what about the Blessed Marie-Madeleine Pérot?' said a voice falling over itself with excitement. 'She's not just Blessed, she's Saint now, and I know a girl whose grandmother was at the Sacred Heart when Mother Pérot was Mistress-General, and the grandmother's still alive.'

We sighed with relief.

'But it's awfully difficult, isn't it, Mother?' said Laura the

pessimist. 'There's the Devil's Advocate, and they've got to prove major miracles worked by direct intercession and all that, haven't they?'

Mother MacDowell gave a small, dour smile at this – very different from the angelic smile of Mother Lucilla.

'It's not the miracles that matter so much, my dear. They're only outward signs. There have been big saints who worked no miracles and little saints who worked many. No, what matters is that the person should have attained heroic sanctity on this earth.'

Heroic sanctity? It sounded very difficult indeed. We were quiet for a minute, knitting our brows. Then one by one we remembered Mother Lucilla's severed finger. If that was not heroic sanctity, what was? But suddenly our thoughts were turned violently back to earth. There was a noise of breaking wood, a shrill scream and a crash. Charlotte had fallen off her perch in the plane tree and was lying on the stones. We drew back, frightened. Mother MacDowell hesitated for a second before she advanced and picked Charlotte up. Then she sat down with Charlotte on her lap while the rest of us stood in a gaping circle. Charlotte's knee bled in streams; Mother MacDowell's habit was already wet and shining. But it was at the nun's face and not at Charlotte's cut knee that we were all looking. For Mother MacDowell had turned from red to a dreadful greenish white. We knew what it was – she was one of those people who cannot bear the sight of blood. But there was no pity in us that day; we all remembered Mother Lucilla, who never flinched at the sight of blood, not even her own. But to do justice to Mother MacDowell, she managed to control herself. Her lips were trembling, she could not speak, but she produced her coarse white handkerchief as big as a table napkin, and began to wipe away the dirt from the cut knee. Finally, having roughly bandaged Charlotte, who behaved with a stoicism worthy of Mother Lucilla herself, she told off four of us to take our wounded friend to the infirmary. We waited in interested silence while the

infirmiry sister unwound the handkerchief. The bleeding had entirely stopped. The sister examined the leg carefully; then she began to laugh. 'Why, you little sillies, there's not even a cut. Run along, Charlotte. There's nothing the matter with you - nothing except a *dirty* knee, that is.'

It was perfectly true. There were specks of brown gravel on Charlotte's knee and that was all. There was not even a spot of blood on the handkerchief.

But when the five of us were in the garden again, Charlotte beckoned us round her, with an air of great solemnity.

'Swear you won't tell - or, rather, don't swear - promise, because it's something holy.'

We promised eagerly.

'Well, you know there *was* a cut on my knee - you all saw how it bled. And it hurt awfully.'

We nodded.

'Well, when Mother MacDowell began to wipe it with her handkerchief, there was suddenly an awful pain in it, as if it had been burnt or something - and then I just *knew* the cut wasn't there any more.'

'But, Charlotte,' I gasped, 'if that really happened - it was a -'

She seized my hand.

'I know,' she said feverishly, 'it was - a miracle.'

We stared at her with awestruck admiration.

But Laura, the rationalist, said:

'Who worked it then? Someone's got to work a miracle. Did you pray to anyone?'

'Well - not exactly. But I had my rosary - the one that touched Her - in my pocket.'

It was quite enough for us. Mother Lucilla was as good as canonized in our eyes.

'Promise not to tell yet,' implored Charlotte.

We promised. And we certainly kept the letter of our promise. But, back on the playground, someone asked Mother MacDowell in an off-hand kind of way:

'How big does a major miracle have to be? Would it be

a major miracle if a broken arm got set by itself? Or if an awfully deep cut suddenly healed up of its own accord?"

But Mother MacDowell turned fiery red and snapped out: "That is enough talk about miracles, children. You are all thoroughly over-excited. You will talk French at supper and go to bed half an hour earlier if this goes on."

We hastily quitted the subject of miracles. Just as we were forming into file to go back to the house, one of the Senior School came running towards Mother MacDowell. She stopped, fumbled in her pocket, and produced a rosary.

"I found this in the Junior School benches, Mother. Does it belong to any of your children?"

The rosary was of the kind rich parents give their children for First Communion presents; carved amethyst beads threaded on a gold chain. Mother MacDowell held it up by the tip of her fingers; had it been any secular object one would have said she held it disdainfully.

"And whose is this?" she asked: "I seem to have seen —"

But Charlotte was already skipping forward to claim her property.

I suppose it must be thirty or forty years since it all happened. Laura is a Carmelite nun, and Charlotte, who married a millionaire, and a Protestant at that, is a grandmother. I might even have forgotten all about it if I had not read in my *Universe* yesterday that the Canonization of the Blessed Keziah MacDowell had just been ratified by the Holy See.

An Idyll

BY ORLO WILLIAMS

I

THE contemplative stranger seeing old Mr. Banks, the rector of Clune, walking slowly from his grey stone church to his grey stone rectory, clean-shaved but for a white moustache, and wearing the white tie natural to the class of sporting parsons of which he is a belated survivor, would observe nothing in him out of keeping with the pastoral peace around him: nor would there appear anything incongruous in the sight of Henry Bishop, in breeches and gaiters, with a gun under his arm, walking under the chestnut trees of the High Farm at Milbury towards the buxom figure of his daughter at the gate. Figures so typical of their surroundings could inspire no comment but one of pleasure at finding humanity so harmonious with nature. To delve in imagination for something untoward in the lives of such thoroughly satisfactory types would appear morbid. Mr. Banks, one would recognize, had been incumbent of Cluné for many years, presented by the lord of the manor who lived in Winterbourne Park close by, hunting a little, shooting in his neighbours' coverts, fishing when the may-fly fluttered up, playing cricket and tennis on long summer afternoons, and conducting his cure of souls with a moderate zeal. As years went on, he would have dropped the hunting and then the shooting, and then the cricket, but not for a long time the tennis, while he probably still played croquet. When he died, another of his type would succeed to Clune Rectory, and perform the same quiet, long-lived cycle, barring, perhaps, the hunting, which is now no sport for poor men. And as for Henry Bishop, the registers of Milbury could show Bishops at High Farm, no doubt, for as many generations as

those of some other parish showed generations of the family of farmers from which had sprung his wife. The farmer's life in such a country is always the same – strenuous in act, restful in thought, separated ever from the bustle of mechanical life and the surging of urban hordes. Gentry, farmers, villagers; 'places,' farms, cottages – three unbroken circles of life, meandering smoothly round their placid centre, the Clumber uplands, so gently curved, so smoothly shaped, in which birth, marriage and death might seem not crises, but natural, easy processes.

Yet the fact that the appearance of these figures did not clash with the murmur of the River Clune between its grassy banks or the cooing of the doves round the lichened walls of the High Farm would in truth be the only warrant for idly supposing that the rector, the farmer, and his wife were exempt from the tragedies and disappointments of human life, or indeed that the triple life-cycle of gentry, farmer, and villager was as placid and regular as the beat of the mill-wheel. Such idle suppositions are not entertained by the regular inhabitants, even of idyllic spots and were certainly not entertained by Henry Bishop, the father of John Bishop, when he stumped about his fields looking shrewdly out of his weather-beaten face, or discussed the affairs of his neighbours at the Swan.

Farmer Bishop, some twenty years ago, was a close man and a prosperous; he had no illusions of a sentimental kind, either about his surroundings or his neighbours. As for the division of Clumber society into gentry, farmers, and village folk, he would have admitted that readily enough, but without any implication of humility at belonging to the second rank. A farmer's place and a farmer's life, solid and comfortable, were good enough for him, and he had no wish to change them or to encourage any such wish in his children. Farmer Bishop saw things, the gentry in particular, exactly as they were. So, at least, he imagined. Parson, squire, and their kind had as little glamour for him as the picturesque old men of the village, whose present or past capacity for work and

beer he knew to a nicety. As a class, landowners seemed to him to be burdened with heavy social obligations and extravagant tastes: their taxes were high, their estates costly to maintain, and they were always wasting half their time in amusement.

For gentle carriage and beauty the farmer had, indeed, an appreciative eye: he knew blood when he saw it, whether in men or beasts. Though he was mildly radical, he was no revolutionary, but honoured in an impersonal way the corporate body of ancestors and living persons which composed the local 'families.'

Towards individuals, however, he could not be so indulgent; how could he, when to his shrewd eye they exposed themselves so frequently to criticism or pity? Lord Winterbourne, for instance, who owned Winterbourne Park, was very 'queer,' and well known to appear embarrassingly intoxicated on public occasions. The squire of Milbury was discontented and poor, as death duties had weighed heavily on his estate and he had large jointures to pay. He could hardly afford to live in Milbury House except by camping in one or two rooms of the beautiful but ill-arranged old mansion. Mrs. Ferrers, over at Boughton Grove, had just run away from her husband, who not long afterwards broke his neck out hunting; and Lady Swainson, over at Quainton, when she was not getting up charity entertainments at which she sang comic songs in a cracked voice, certainly consoled herself with spirits. They had all kinds of troubles, the gentry, rich and poor alike; and the poor, when they happened to be parsons, with more duties and far less privileges than squires, aroused in Farmer Bishop's mind no feeling but of rather contemptuous pity. Yes, he had heard many strange stories and seen some queer things in his fifty years at Milbury. Nearly all the gentry seemed fated to come to grief in one way or another: farmers who had a bit of capital and minded their own business never came to grief. If one only waited long enough, so the farmer almost unconsciously put it to himself, every one of them gave you something to laugh at or crow over. Sometimes they had to

sell in a hurry, and canny farmers bought a few more acres or animals than they wanted. He liked them well enough as institutions, and touched his hat to them without surliness; they were pleasantly spoken, and their young men in pink and their girls in dainty frocks were quite to be admired, but such children weren't much use to their dads, when all was said and done. Farmer Bishop saw to it that his own children were brought up to be useful.

No fancy education for them, but a few years at the local Grammar School or girls' school, and then back to the farm with them to save something in wages. The boys learned under him the business in which they would spend their lives, and the girls - no governessing for Molly and Ellen, thank you - prepared to be wives of other farmers or to be spinsters, not without value, at the farm which would always have room enough to hold them. They could look after the chickens and the dairy, the choir and the Sunday School, and decorate the church for the various festivals.

Mr. Bishop was a drab, self-centred man, with an enormous secret conceit in his own prosperity. Being a widower did not trouble him, nor did the emigration of his younger son to Canada; he was only anxious for John to settle down. John was a handsome lad, rather too fond of enjoying himself, playing tennis and cricket in white trousers when he ought to have been in the fields. It was high time he got married, and his father, leaning heavily upon a gate one summer evening, was pondering possible daughters-in-law, when he saw John walking and whistling along the footpath that led from Milbury to Clune. He wondered if there was anyone in that direction, but shook his head. Never mind, an opportunity would come. Farmer Bishop prided himself on taking opportunities; his opportunities were frequently other people's misfortunes.

II

Milbury lay on one side of the River Clune, and Clune village lay on the other side, three miles up the stream,

beyond the Milbury woods. Both villages with their sisters, Tillington and Upper and Lower Compton, were part of that smiling valley below the high road on the ridge which runs from London to the north-west. Along that road, with its row of double telegraph posts, the currents of the world might pass, but in the valley nothing passed that was swifter than the current of the Clune. John Bishop, carrying a tennis racket, was walking at a very reasonable speed to Tillington Farm, whose owner, a rather crushed individual, was obliged to let the farm-house in the summer and live in a cottage. The weekly guineas made a difference to him. The summer tenants of Tillington Farm were old Mrs. Hardy, wife of the lately deceased Vicar of Tillington, and her married daughter Mrs. Rennell, whose husband worked in some London office, and came down for week-ends. John Bishop had been asked to tea to make a fourth at tennis with them and Cicely Banks.

It was not the first time he had been to Tillington Farm for this purpose. Sometimes Molly or Ellen went with him, and Farmer Bishop made no objection, though he saw no sense in playing tennis at all, because going to tea with old Mrs. Hardy and her daughter did not in the least outrage his sense of the fitness of things. Mr. Hardy, the son of a cathedral organist, had married the daughter of a prosperous draper in the cathedral town: they had none of the inclinations of a sporting parson who knew all the chief families in the county, but were far more at home with the farmers. The Vicar counted among the gentry and met the Squire on equal terms, but the farmers and their wives never felt out of their element at the Vicarage when Mr. Hardy was alive, and on its lawn their children played unconstrainedly with the young Hardys and the children of other lesser gentry. Even Cicely Banks had played there in childhood, for her mother and father were glad enough to get her off their hands while they went off to play tennis with their own sort. One of their own sort had now come to Tillington Vicarage, and farmers' wives were only to be

seen there on special and uncomfortable occasions; but Tillington Farm, when Mrs. Hardy took it, became another borderland in which a young Banks and a young Bishop might play together without noticeable incongruity. Farmer Bishop only shook his head because he thought these tennis-teas a waste of time; 'gettin' all of a mullock battin' a ball back and forwards over a net leads to nothin' that I can see.' In a general way he was right, but in this particular case, not being aware how the circumstances of life struck young Miss Banks, he made a mistake.

In Cicely's outlook on life in the Clumber Hills there was as little glamour as in Farmer Bishop's; the difference was that Cicely wanted glamour, whereas Farmer Bishop preferred a drab light. The girl had mousy hair, blue eyes, a freckled nose and rather full cheeks with two rosy spots under the eyes that became crimson when she was cross: she had a fine complexion, but she was no beauty, nor was she a passionate, languishing, exciting heroine of romance. Her ordinary little soul was rather starved: everything at Clune Rectory always was rather starved that the selfishness of Mr. Banks might be fed. Mr. Banks had always been quite amiable but quite firm on that point: his views on it had determined his choice of a wife. Having no money of his own and seeing that a country living would not support even the mild tastes of a country gentleman, he had married a bright and florid young lady, the daughter of a by no means aristocratic stockbroker, who had a capacity for devotion and a satisfactory dowry. With these Mr. Banks had at first made himself exceedingly comfortable. Two horses, a smart trap and groom, a fine garden, an excellent cook, and all the entertainment he wanted were his; in return he had accepted his wife with all her limitations and had tolerated, without much interest, the birth of one daughter.

About five years after his marriage an uncomfortably large portion of the dowry had disappeared in the failure of a company which also submerged the stockbroker, but Mrs.

Banks's devotion remained unimpaired. It was a perfectly menial devotion with very little fine feeling about it. The stout, red-cheeked woman with restless, staring eyes had fallen a victim to her husband as another woman might have to a fat and lazy cat. She bustled about his comfort from morning till night, relieving herself from the strain of this altruism by gossiping spitefully of every other person in the neighbourhood. This was her only entertainment, for she never rode or played any games herself. Mr. Banks had no wish to be bothered with mounting her in the hunting field, and, as she came nowhere near his standard in tennis or croquet, her place was to sit by the side of the lawn and watch him, faithfully fielding any balls that disappeared into the flower-beds.

Cicely did not remember the time of full prosperity. She had not seen the reductions – unavoidable in spite of Mrs. Banks's devotion – the disappearance of the second horse and the gardener, the substitution of an inferior cook and the very obvious deterioration in Mrs. Banks's wardrobe. Her earliest recollections were of a godlike father, admirably clothed whether in broadcloth or shining white flannels, who ate dishes in which other people were not expected to share and went out to all kinds of places where other people were not expected to follow him, besides presiding at services in church. Mr. Banks's manner in church was that of an amiable, level-voiced chairman at a general meeting of not very intelligent shareholders. The services had never impressed her much, but the much more fervent ministrations in the Rectory at the shrine of the rector had impressed her immensely. Mrs. Banks had the gift of inspiring all her subministrants, male and female alike, with the same devotion to an urbane but thankless god. She hypnotized them in their revolts so powerfully that they felt it impossible to continue recalcitrant at the awful price of Mr. Banks's discomfort. Mr. Banks never had to command. He had only to say with a sigh, 'I do wish –' or with quiet irony, 'Is the cook really incapable of –?' or quite airily, 'I think the

lawn wants rolling,' and his wish was fulfilled, the cook became capable and Mrs. Banks rolled the lawn - she perspired readily in such a cause. Nobody else in the house ever asked for anything; Cicely soon learned that. They got on as cheerfully as they could with what was left for them. So Cicely soon joined her mother in bustling about, rolling, mowing, darning, hunting tennis balls and seeing that the other men who came to play tennis had three cups of tea each and all the sandwiches.

III

John Bishop's arrival at Tillington Farm was eagerly expected by Mr. and Mrs. Rennell and Cicely, who were desultorily knocking balls to one another. At last he came, in rather tight and yellow flannel trousers, smiling pleasantly from a heavy but handsome face.

'Ah, here you are, John,' cried Mrs. Rennell. 'Come along quick and have a set before tea. We'll take you and Cicely on. Rough or smooth, Cicely?'

The racket was spun.

'Smooth. Smooth it is. Will you serve, John?' said Cicely.

'All right, Miss Cicely,' he answered calmly. As a boy he had called her 'Cicely,' but now he found a certain awkwardness in calling any young woman by an unadorned Christian name. He blushed easily and spoke slowly. He could snub his sisters, but any other young woman could shut him up with a word.

The game went on seriously, almost in silence but for 'well played!', 'yours!' and the calling of the score. The married pair lost, and old Mrs Hardy called them in to tea.

'You're in good form to-day, Miss Cicely,' was all John ventured.

'Thank you, John. We must beat them again afterwards.' She liked to win, and felt benevolent to her partner, who had played hard and was wiping his brow. She wondered that he got so hot; Mr. Banks played a polished game and never perspired.

Soon after tea tennis was resumed and went on till seven, absorbing all thoughts and energies. When it was over they all felt a little flat and chilly.

'Put on your coat, child,' said Mrs. Rennell. Cicely obeyed, without waiting to see if John Bishop would hold it open for her. He had not learned those little things.

Mrs. Hardy could afford to be hospitable in a homely way: she liked gatherings of young people, for they reminded her of old days at the Vicarage. Couldn't they stay for a bit of supper? Mrs. Banks wouldn't be anxious.

Cicely had never known Mrs. Banks anxious about anybody but her husband, so she stayed. They had cold ham and a jam tart, and talked with animation, chiefly about near neighbours.

At last, good night. Cicely was walking, having punctured the tyre of her bicycle. 'John will go along with you, then,' cackled Mrs. Hardy. 'It's on his way to Milbury.' John said, 'Very pleased, I'm sure,' lifted his hat and held the gate open. They walked some way in unconstrained silence up the road.

The sun had sunk behind the ridge, and the telegraph posts stood up black against the rosy sky. The peace and beauty of a calm summer evening lay upon the countryside; the air, already chillier, was yet full of warm, sweet smells, wafted in gusts, of honeysuckle and hay. More sensitive souls might well have found such loveliness overpowering. To æsthetic beauty theirs were not sensitive: what brought so many artists to their villages neither of them realized. Yet the spell of the sweet summer dusk lay upon them, and the mellow light brought favour into their faces. John thought Cicely was a pretty girl, and Cicely said, 'What a lovely evening!' taking a long delicious sniff of the air.

'Yes, we shall have fine weather now for a spell,' said John prosaically.

Cicely, unaccountably, felt herself impelled to talk.

'That means lots more tennis, and walks on the quarries for me. I love walking up there: it's so lovely, and you see so far. Do you ever go for walks, John?'

'No, I can't say I do. I get all the walk I want in the fields, and that's the truth, Miss Cicely.'

'Oh, but it's quite different up in the quarries, and you can sit in the shade of the quarry woods when you're tired. Do you remember how we used to go picnics up there and play hide and seek?'

'When we were kids.' John gave a hoarse laugh. 'There was one time when I hid with you in a bush and kept 'em all looking for half an hour, Miss Cicely.'

Cicely was quiet for a moment, and then she was bold. 'Why do you call me Miss Cicely? It's so silly. I call you John, as I always did, and you must call me Cicely.'

John blushed, looked sideways at her, and said, 'Aw, very well.'

Cicely looked at John, and John looked at Cicely; both smiled. For the first time in her life Cicely thought John was a good-looking boy. John was twenty-four, and he had often kissed girls; never before had he wanted to kiss Cicely. Cicely did not know why her heart began to beat so riotously. They were near the corner where the lane met the road to Clune, at the gate of a meadow.

'Let's rest a minute, John,' she said, 'I'm rather tired.' She leaned her arm on the gate, and bent her head back. She had a shapely body and a white throat. John came and leaned on the gate close beside her. Cicely brushed a lock away from her temple and looked at him sidelong. She saw admiration in his eyes: at once she loved him.

After a few minutes of silence, they walked on. John might have been bolder had Cicely not been Miss Banks. Cicely was bold again. She looked up and down the road: it was deserted, and the dusk was thickening. 'Let me take your arm up the hill, John.' To her surprise she said it and took his arm. A wave of desire cut through John Bishop. He pressed the warm arm, almost involuntarily, with his own. Somehow, before long, their two hands were interlocked, but their eyes looked away, afraid to see what their hands were doing. But eyes cannot look into space for ever.

At the top of the hill, in sight of the village, Cicely gently and slowly withdrew her arm. She had to look at him as she said, 'Thank you, John,' and fire rose up in her cheeks.

'When will you be over our way again?' he asked anxiously.

'I was going to walk to the quarries to-morrow afternoon,' she answered. 'Perhaps your sisters will be in to tea.'

'Ellen's going out with the old man, but Moll will be glad of company.' He went on awkwardly, 'I might meet you on the quarries, maybe.'

'All right, John,' she said softly. 'Good night.'

They shook hands lightly, and Cicely turned in at the Rectory gate, but John's grasp burned in her palm all through a restless night.

Next day they met upon the quarries, and down in a hollow he gave her one kiss, then many more. She kissed him once, and on her way home she cried with all the beauty of it.

So John and Cicely became secret lovers, and their bower was the old grass-grown quarries, where, but for the old shepherd, hardly a man or woman was ever seen. They gave themselves up to passion without calculations or conditions. They put out of sight the ordinary workaday life with which they might one day have to square accounts. Cicely surrendered herself without a tremor to the deep peace that she found in John's arms: it was all like a dream, and she found it impossible to bring her actions to the bar of conscience. Their only fear was discovery, which would mean trouble and separation. It was not so difficult to keep their secret, for in all that wide country there were few eyes to see them, and the eyes that should have been vigilant for Cicely were closed in selfish indifference.

But the secrets of a brother are never safe from sisters. Molly and Ellen were simple, good-natured girls, without spite, and quite prepared for John to have his flirtations. Yet, as Molly remarked, people have eyes in their heads. Sisters' eyes are more than ordinary eyes: they read thoughts and record hidden currents. Let a brother and the lady

of his heart tread never so warily on a Sunday at tea, one glance, one tone of the voice, is enough to betray them when two sisters sit at the table.

Said Ellen to Molly: 'Our John's got it bad again.'

'That's plain enough,' answered Molly.

'And what's the good, with a girl like that? He might have had more sense.'

'It's her fault, leading the boy on. I could give her a good slap, stuck-up little thing.'

'But she's just silly about him, poor child. I've seen them walking together on the quarries close as two apples on a tree.'

'How?'

'Dad's glasses.'

'H'm. There'll be trouble when *he* knows.'

Dad knew soon enough: they saw to that.

'Where's the lad?' he asked casually one day. Molly glanced at Ellen.

'Need you ask?' she said petulantly. 'He's up in the quarries along of Cicely Banks.'

'Bless my soul,' said the farmer, 'what's he doin' with her?'

'Spoonin', of course. John's sick for her, and you ought to speak to him, Dad. Someone'll get talking one of these days, and then we'll have Mrs. Banks clattering over here and pretty doings there'll be.'

Farmer Bishop rubbed his chin. Molly prepared fearfully for an explosion that never came.

'Twould be better if Mrs. Banks minded her own business,' he said. 'Let the lad be. 'Twill soon cool off.'

Then he went off and smoked thoughtfully: now and then he chuckled. The Reverend Banks would be none too pleased if he knew: the farmer felt a secret satisfaction at the thought. Miss Cicely was a fine lass, and John would do well if he brought down such a bird. And he was good enough for her, too. To go spoonin' with Miss Banks, Winterbourne blood - he slapped his knee - John was a young spark and no mistake. It might come to nothing, but *he* wasn't going to spare the Bankses any trouble, not he.

Time enough to act, if things came to a head. Things happened like that, sometimes, in the summer, no matter who it was.

'Twas the girl's look-out, anyway.

He spoke to John in the fields next morning.

'You're after the girls again, I hear, John.'

John blushed and looked stubborn.

'I ask ye no questions,' the farmer went on. 'Have your fun while you're young. I was a lad myself. But listen, John. Never let a woman get the better of you. Have your own way with 'em. That's what they're made for. I can't bear to see a young fellow ditherin' about women as if he was afraid of them. So long as you stick to farming and get no silly fancies, you can afford to have your play. You've sense in your head, John. But mind, so long as you act straight with me, my lad, I'll back you up, no matter what. Now I'll be off home.'

John said nothing.

Sweets cannot last for ever, but Cicely was unprepared for a sudden end to hers. An aunt in Yorkshire demanded her companionship in August for three months. Mrs. Banks was delighted, and Cicely had to simulate equal delight. Weeping she told John there was only a fortnight before they parted: beyond a fortnight lovers' eyes cannot see. Cicely wept and clung, and John, even, wept a little with her. Desire ran wild within them, and John, unconsciously, remembered his father's words. 'Have your fun while you're young.' They were both young and beside themselves with passion. Cicely yielded herself without a regret. More than once in that fortnight she stole away at dusk to the quarry woods, desperate with longing, and surrendered herself, body and soul, to the man who had won her, and on the last night after a long kiss she tore herself, sobbing, away.

Mr. Banks himself drove her to the station next day, as he was to play tennis near by. He remarked on his return that Cicely looked pale: also that the lawn wanted mowing. Mrs. Banks attended dutifully to the latter remark.

It was a blustering night in mid-December. A north-west wind howled in the chimneys of High Farm, like a lion held at bay by the blazing coals of the heaped-up fire. Molly and Ellen had gone to bed, and Farmer Bishop sat in his kitchen arm-chair smoking his last pipe. John sat opposite him on the settle, gazing heavily into the coals.

'Farm's done well this year,' said the farmer thoughtfully.

'Aw' - from John.

'Ay, we made a tidy bit. 'Twas a good job we bought them fields off the Squire.'

'Aw.'

'I've a mind to buy that horse and trap of Mainwaring's. He'll be havin' a sale soon, I hear. I always said he wouldn't do no good; no money behind him.'

The farmer slapped his pocket. John said, 'Aw,' again. 'What's up, lad; can't ye speak? Shall we buy that trap?'

'Aw, I dunno. Look here, dad, I'm in a fix.'

'A fix, eh? What, gamblin' and bettin', I suppose?' The farmer's voice was hard.

'No,' said John wearily, 'nothin' to do with money. Cicely Banks, she's back.'

'Still sweet on her, John?'

'It's not that. She's in trouble. She told me yesterday. That's what.' John kept his eyes on the ground, to avoid the wrath which he imagined in his father's eyes. But those hard eyes had a frosty twinkle in them.

'She's in trouble along of you, is she, you young rip? Well, I never. What'll the Reverend Banks say, to be sure, and that meddlesome old woman of his? Nice doin's for the Rectory. Has the girl told 'em yet?'

'She was to tell her mother to-day; said she couldn't keep it secret any more.' John's voice shook a little. 'I've been a bloody fool, dad: what am I to do?'

Farmer Bishop thought for a few moments, and there was secret pride in his thoughts. A Banks - Winterbourne

blood – got with child by his son. Another of the gentry brought low by their own foolishness. He had always felt that the Bankses, inside whose gate he had never been, were of those at whose expense he could afford to wait. Every year the broad acres of High Farm swelled with rich crops and cattle grew fat and multiplied; but nothing grew fat and multiplied at Clune Rectory: there was only a daily dwindling of health and strength and pleasure, and a meagre old age in prospect for such as the Bankses. The girl was a fool, of course, but not such a blasted fool as her mother.

‘Why couldn’t you wait, John, and marry her proper?’ he said. He knew the answer, but was testing his son.

‘Well, so I would have,’ answered John indignantly, ‘but her mother wouldn’t have let her marry a farmer. You know that as well as I do.’

‘Did you ask her?’

‘No, I didn’t. What’d have been the good?’

‘Did you want to?’ John scratched his head.

‘Damned if I know. I was fond enough of the girl.’

‘Well, you were a fool, John, not to know your own mind before you got her in the family way, poor soul: for you’ve got to marry her now, anyway.’

‘Maybe they won’t let her.’

‘Won’t let her? Don’t be such a soft fool!’ The farmer snorted with indignation. ‘A farmer’s son not good enough for Miss Banks, eh? They should ha’ thought of that before. It’s for *we* to say now if we will or we won’t. You mark my words, they’ll be round here fast enough, prayin’ us to make the best of a bad job. I’ll see that cacklin’ woman down on her knees. You keep out of the way, boy; I’ll fix it. . . .’

‘But, dad . . .’

‘There’s no buts about it. All you’ve got to do is to tell me this – Will you marry the girl and bring her home here? I’d be proud to make her welcome so long as she’s a good wife to you and suits herself to High Farm. She’ll have to be a farmer’s wife and her children farmer’s children. Aw, she’ll be ashamed at first, of course, and there’ll be a bit of

gossip; those that outrun the parson have to pay for it. But if she's any spirit she'll face it out and settle down here among us and have her kid. Things blow over quick enough if people keep to themselves and don't go gossiping about in parsons' drawin'-rooms. But if you won't bring her here as your wife to bear you children and help you to take over High Farm when I'm gone, not a finger I'll stir for either of you, and there'll be a bastard at Clune Rectory, for she's no money to marry on, no more have you but what I give you. So there, lad: you stick by me and I'll stick by you. Winterbourne blood's good blood, and I like the girl. Now, what's it to be?"

John shuffled his feet a little: then he said:

"Thank ye, dad. I don't want to leave the farm, and I'll marry Cicely and do the square by her. But she wasn't bred to farm, you know, and'll find our ways rough for her, maybe. Then there's Moll an' Ellen . . ."

Farmer Bishop got up and put his hand firmly on John's shoulder. "Look here, boy: understand this. When men make up their minds, women ha' got to follow. It'll be the worse for them, else. When you're married, your wife'll have to suit her ways to yours. She'll have to learn. Let her start on a right understandin' from the first. I'm master here now, and you'll be master when I'm gone. As for Moll and Ellen, I should hope they'd have sense enough in their heads to make no trouble. There's room for all at High Farm. So don't you fret. There'll be Mrs. Banks clatterin' over here in the morning, I'll lay. When I've seen her, we can get to business. Good night."

The farmer stumped off to bed, and John followed him in silence.

As the farmer surmised, Mrs. Banks drove to High Farm next morning. The cheeks of that unfortunate woman for once were pale and her eyes were red: she was feeling ten years older since the afternoon before when Cicely, trembling and sobbing, had told her of the dread which had grown to certainty since her return. To say that Mrs.

Banks had been appalled would be a mild statement: her matronly bosom nearly burst with anger and terror. She had assuaged the anger in a torrent of abuse which she poured over the sobbing girl whom she had finally driven in hysterics to her room. The terror had remained. For once hypnotism was useless, menial devotion of no avail. Nothing could parry the fatal blow to Mr. Banks's peace of mind nor put off the awful moment of confession. Awful it had been. With cold bitterness her husband had flayed her; his tongue had cut her like a whip of wire, and with a lively sarcasm he had sketched to her the picture of himself, rector of Clune, cousin to Lord Winterbourne, his own parishioner, exposed to the evil tongues of his neighbours through the stupidity of his idiotic wife and the wickedness of his worthless daughter. When he had reduced her to pulp, he informed her that he would never see his daughter again, and that arrangements must be made as soon as possible to remove her from the house, meanwhile she should keep to her room. Mrs. Banks might make what other arrangements she pleased for the girl's future, but, whether married or unmarried, she was never to come into Clune Rectory as long as he lived.

Haunted by the memory of this awful night, Mrs. Banks drove up to the door of High Farm to claim what justice she could for her still weeping daughter. Being a woman of spirit, though a fool, she entered snorting: Farmer Bishop received her with grave politeness.

'Good day, ma'am. Won't you sit down?'

Mrs. Banks flounced down on a hard chair in the parlour and began in a fury:

'This is a very serious matter, Mr. Bishop. I can hardly tell you what a dreadful thing has happened. Cicely - your good-for-nothing son has - has betrayed her. She only told me yesterday. Her father and I are furious.'

'Bless my soul, Mrs. Banks,' said the farmer, 'this is bad news. Do I understand you to say my John has been makin' love to Miss Cicely?'

'Making love, indeed! Worse than that, he's betrayed her, I tell you, and there's the poor girl sobbing and crying in her room all because of this low young son of yours.'

'Well, ma'am, I'm sorry, I wouldn't ha' thought a young girl so well brought up and so well looked after by her mother' - Mrs. Banks went crimson - 'would have given a farmer's son the chance of carryin' on with her. However, the harm's done now, and can't be helped. Least said soonest mended. I'll forbid him to see her any more, the young rascal.'

Mrs. Banks nearly leapt out of her chair.

'My good man, I tell you she's going to have a *baby*! Something must be done at once. They'll have to be married, don't you see?'

The farmer looked very grave, and paused a moment. The words came slowly out of his mouth. 'That's awkward, to be sure. Ye see, I looked for John to marry a girl that'd bring him a bit o' money. A farmer wants cah-pital. Now, if John marries Miss Cicely, what'll they marry on? Will she bring any money with her? And where would they live?' He rubbed his short grey beard reflectively.

'How can you talk like that,' Mrs. Banks burst out, 'as if it didn't matter what has happened? Of course, we must try to arrange something and find them a home somewhere. It might be better for them to emigrate and start fresh in Canada; of course, Cicely can't live in this neighbourhood. But we can settle all that later. The chief thing is to marry them now, don't you see?'

'I don't see,' the farmer answered shortly. 'Tell me this, what will they live on? Who's to start them farmin' in Canada? Is Mr. Banks puttin' any money down?'

Mrs. Banks hesitated and crumpled her handkerchief nervously.

'Not a penny, I lay,' the farmer went on remorselessly. 'Parsons have no money, and your husband's a near man, well I know. What you're askin', not to say orderin', me to do is to let my son marry a young girl without sixpence to her name, whether I like it or not, and put down the cash

to keep them till they can keep themselves, without a word of thanks. You want me to let John go away from High Farm because it wouldn't do for the Reverend Banks to have a daughter that's married a farmer livin' near him. If that's it you may go back to Mr. Banks at once and tell him I won't do it. John can marry the girl if he wants to, but if it's to be on those terms he don't get sixpence from me.'

Mrs. Banks made an effort to pull herself together for one final onslaught which should carry the stubborn farmer, as she had carried many a stubborn cook, off his feet; but, weakened as she was by her husband's much more deadly onslaught of the night before and by the realization of the hopelessness of her position, she dropped in the moment of her spring and began to cry.

'Don't be so hard, Mr. Bishop: it's more than I can bear. Everyone's against me, even my own husband. I know I haven't been a good mother to Cicely, but think of the poor girl. Oh, what am I to do, what am I to do?'

'Don't take on so, ma'am,' said the farmer. 'Listen here to what I say. John told me all about it last night, and I told him he must act square by the girl. But that's no reason why he should leave home and the farm I've been keeping for him and his children. He shall marry Cicely, and he shall bring her back here to be a farmer's wife and be of some use in the world instead of gossipin' and tennis-playin'. We shan't talk spitefully of her, as her own folk will, but I'll welcome her as my own daughter and, for all she's outrun the parson, Mrs. John Bishop'll hold up her head at High Farm. Not a penny will I take with her; Mr. Banks spends all he's got, I warrant. But mind this - my son's wife will live in her station. I'll not have her hangin' about on sufferance on the skirts of the gentry. She's given herself to a farmer's son and a farmer's wife she'll be, livin' with farmers, seein' farmers and bringin' farmers into the world. It is good-bye to fal-lals for her, and a good job too. If she's the girl I take her for she'll do it, and John shall go and ask her to-day. And if Parson Banks can't put up with the shame of

havin' his daughter marry a son of mine, well, let him go elsewhere: 'twill be small loss to Clune.'

Mrs. Banks sniffed on, overcome and helpless. She had to agree, and home she went to face another blizzard from her husband's tongue, and to make arrangements for smuggling the sinner to a friend's house in the cathedral town. There, before long, the marriage was performed in a registry office, and the news had hardly burst on the astonished ears of all that dwell in Clune Valley, when Mrs. John Bishop made her entry into High Farm.

Life was not all roses for her. Many and many a time the martingale of circumstance brought her head down with a sharp jerk. If the contemplative stranger were to ask her now what was left of her young daydreams, she might smile bleakly. And yet, he would say, she is not unhappy. She has long been at home in High Farm, its mistress and the mother of its heirs. Love soon fled, but a rough kindness remained. It was a 'shocking thing,' said the gentry, and Mr. Banks never relented: yet the aches and the smarts of it all have long grown old. They have been absorbed into the calm, grey peace of the Clumber Hills, and that same peace has settled on the faces of all those who made and suffered them. The peace of the grave is on Mrs. Banks, and upon Farmer Bishop it will soon fall. For twelve years now he has sat, half imbecile, in his chimney corner, struck down at the height of his pride through a fall from his horse. For twelve years Cicely has tended him, fed him and learned to understand his inarticulate mouthings. She calls him 'Dad,' and wipes his bleary old eyes when he sometimes cries, remembering the man he was. And John himself is at peace. When his wife gets into one of her 'tempers' he walks out whistling into the fields. He knows there will be peace for those who wait patiently, the peace of the Clumber Hills that can heal so many scars, grow over them, soften their edges with its rains and dim their rawness with its delicate lights, till what is left of them becomes part of itself, blunted and lichenized as the Clumber stone.

On with the Dance

BY ROMER WILSON

Told by GEORGE "CLAYTON" to his crony JOHN SAUNDERS one foggy evening at the Mitre Inn, Chancery Lane

'You know, John, we had a clerk in our office, a four-pound a-week man called Charlie Hart. I liked that fellow. Beyond the ordinary he was. I talk of him as if he were dead, but if he cares you shall meet him some day. Yes, in a sense, he is slightly dead, from the social point of view. He was a good clerk, yes, indeed, careless now and then, but in his way a genius. The strange thing of him as a clerk was that he never felt the difference between copying an affidavit and giving a pronouncement on a ticklish point of law, and casually he used to give pronouncements that made our name in the courts. "You get Clayton and Clayton behind you and you'll catch a falling star." Someone said that of him once, and it was a true saying. If he had only known himself, he might have sat the Woolsack, but he had not the craziest idea who he was.

'He had several silly habits; told his dreams in the office every morning, and advised whoever was present - bar clients - every time he went to the water-closet; told us how many letters per annum came from clients beginning with B as against the rest of the alphabet; and he was a demon smoker. It was strange how all things seemed wonderful to him from the cat in the yard to a Bach Mass in Temple Church. He was fonder of music than I am of golf, and as like as not spent Sunday at a concert.

' "As like as not," I say, and I might also say "as not as

like," if there is any sense in that. Having paid my subscription, I go down to Walton Heath willynily like the soft fool I am, but he, though he loved music ten times more than I love clinking round a course, or ever shall, used time and time again to delay in the Green Park, like a tramp, with a five-bob ticket in his purse, and for sheer joy of the green grass fall asleep on his belly.

'He was a four-pound-a-week man, but Tom and I ought to have had him for partner, only we could not have stood it. You see he was so exciting. Whatever he did got you roused. If Charlie Hart mended the fire, you got thinking of infernal flames or *Rheingold* or something like that, because he had them in mind himself, and his mind overflowed – not in talk, his usual conversation was as dull as a ledger.

'However, we could not tie Charlie up for money, and between us we invented him an uncle and a legacy and a mass of twaddle that gave him two hundred a year outside the office. Any other clerk would have gone off with a snook at our ground-glass door and either damned or made himself, but Charles remained with us exactly as before. We used to think he ought to have worked for the Bar – mind you, he was a full-term solicitor – but he never did.

'His accent was a bit off colour, and he had some peculiar words at his command which did not give confidence; always said "magnaminious" for "magnanimous." At bottom, you know, in spite of a certain flightiness, he possessed a deep fund of sense that gave him at times a kind of second sight. I dare say he was wise about the Bar, he was a man of sense – except over women. And the bits of fancy-work he got entangled with beggar description. Yet you know, if ever I met Charlie out with a girl, and that was not difficult to do, I assure you, I should be thrilled to the marrow somehow, and whatever she was, wherever I met them, I would expect to hear birds begin to sing or to see a rainbow bloom overhead, or I'd think of some tomfoolery like new-mown hay.

'Strangely, he never spoke of his private affairs, never discussed women in my hearing at all, but, my God! when his love was on the wax, it swelled like an organ note through the office, boomed like the summer sea, and when he was cooling off, he would sometimes treat us to a spell of aerial gaiety or a fit of suicidal gloom. I believe in actual practice he was a most successful lover.

'He left us during the War, of course, and of course married above him directly he got his commission. I cannot imagine what that section of his life can have meant to him. In 1919 he returned to us as of old, and his wife blew away in a westerly gale. I suppose, like many another, she only married a soldier. I don't blame them. It is the natural thing. She was in Paris with him when I lent him to A. G., and as I say, she blew out of his arms in a storm. But what of it? He soon found comfort elsewhere.

'The singular thing was that none of his regular young women – I don't speak of his freakish marriage – gave him the least trouble. He was the one man I know who could have run a harem. Why, I have heard him in the middle of a madness for Maud say to his Flora on our stairs: "Give us a peck for old time's sake!" and I have seen them kiss, and she smack his face, and he her behind. "Be good, sweet maid" – he'd cry. "Maid yourself," she'd answer, and run happily downstairs.

'He would come into the office and go over to the grimy window for a glimpse of her below and exclaim, "It's a good world! – What kids these women are, aren't they, Archie?" And the junior would whistle to warn him my door was ajar. But what did he care for that? He had said his say. You know he called my brother "The Old Dud" and me "Bismuth" – "Bizzy," more usually. He was to the point. Tom wears his coats to a green blush and I chew the cud. If needs must, I take bismuth for it. I keep it on the desk next the red ink.

'I miss that man. I miss him. What the devil did he go in the bloom of his life and ruin himself for? I think his

catastrophe has turned my brain a little. I suppose I loved the fool. I deplore his absence, and he can never come back. His jollity, his kindness! One Christmas he gave me a dog. I, of course, sent the usual turkey and a box of cigars. Fancy giving me a dog! A dog, sir! A mongrel hound, a pure-bred bastard pup. I love that dog. "There goes Bizzy Clayton and his dog." They say that now of me at the Inn, and I like 'em to, you know. It flatters me. Why the devil I like it I cannot tell you. My liking has something ghostly in it, something a little wistful, sentimental – especially towards five o'clock of a foggy evening.

'Here, come out from under, you there! Ho, Jack Frost, sir! What a mug! What a muzzle! He dines with me, you see, John. That's the dog he gave me. Down, sir! In good time! All in good time! Saved the brute from starvation and landed him on me. Well, ultimately I saved Clerk Charlie from the gallows.

'It is no long tale.

'One night, as he told me, and he told me the truth, he went uptown to a theatre with some pretty bit of jade. They had supper and some foul mixture called Beaune, and on the way home he sang aloud to his dear some song of Wolf's or Schubert's with German words, wrongish he sang it from beginning to end. Down Charing Cross Road and through to the Strand he went, singing like mad. The road was up near Southampton Street, a deep drain cutting; and a man there shouted at him as he passed: "If you can't sing English, don't sing at all!" He turned right round and bellowed: "Ich liebe dich!" and clouted the man over into the drain. The fall broke the gentleman's neck, and two inches of muddy water drowned any protest he might have made with his last breath.

'That is all. The girl screamed, the night watchman swore, and gave evidence enough to hang a Boys' Brigade.

'Well, I tell you, I was upset. I was determined, cost what it might, that Charlie should neither hang nor spend twenty-odd summers and winters in jail. He had, as far as

I felt, simply been a bit careless again. I told you he was given to carelessness. I could not do with the idea of our Charlie in the noose, I could not do with it – nor behind bars either. I could not abide it, nor could my brother Tom. So we briefed Gritworth for the defence and he was ready to hash up all chance of salvation on points. The fool was going to ride for manslaughter. It irritated me. One day, half in spite of myself, I said:

“Manslaughter! What do you want with manslaughter when a man is decently mad?”

“Oh, he’s mad, is he?” barked Gritworth.

“I bet you ten pound,” I snapped, “if we can dig up his private papers – if he has any – but he is damned queer about his Privy Council – not only I, but you and the whole box of tricks will say he is as crazy as anyone ever His Majesty let out at the back door of mercy!”

“Right!” said Gritworth. “Get them! It is a degenerate age.”

Well, I asked him. Poor Charlie looked mad and pale that afternoon like a Memling martyr. He was not at all his usual self. The poor soul cried, and that upset me.

He said he kept some private papers at the office between Perkins *vs.* Perkins and Postgate *vs.* Waine & Buchan. I told him that was all right; he could keep what he liked at the office. I told him our line of fire and asked him what the stuff at our place consisted of. Any man’s private papers are good boodle for a jury. All men exposed seem mad. I had a shock nevertheless when he said it was poetry.

“The very thing,” I cheered him up, but my heart sank. Poetry of clerks is apt to be very tame raving.

That night, however, I went down alone to the office and locked the door and got his poetry out of file. Directly I touched it I felt a bit oddish, there alone in the dusty office with the lamp casting shadows on the yellow walls. So I made up a brisk fire, and the old excitement came on me, got me in the pit of the stomach – I was Siegfried, or a great brute stoking a liner – then I drew my round chair to the

blaze and read. When I had done reading, I took a glass of port and sat up all night wondering and wondering. 'I had expected stuff about spring and odes to his young women, but this you see here is what I got. Where is it now? Here we are. I'll read you a bit to show you how matters stood. Well, for a start:

*"God went mad, made Earth and Paradise -
Repented. Tempted Abram. Did not dare
Stand by and see the incestuous sacrifice.
Tried Babel, Flood, and Flare.
Tried to undo his mad-work, was afraid
Ever to quite undo the thing he'd made."*

or hear this:

*"When shall God steel himself for Judgement Day?
Whereon he first must judge himself, and slay
Or save All Souls by what his Ghost shall say?"*

and this doggerel was put down with a ream of stuff in that line. Look at this!

*"Burn in hell, green soul!
Splutter, sapling heart!
God fears the whole,
I fear the part."*

'Mere jingle. But this is what saved him from the gallows:

*"Poor pitiful old beggar, what do you want?
There is a beauty of winter in your woe.
A penny to buy a world with? I'd enchant
The devil's kindness if I did him know."*

It is like Charlie to leave that decrepit line.

*"But Holy Ghost has cast him up with God
In one grand total of the damned and blest,
And Even now adds evenly with Odd,
And East and North are one with South and West."*

*Old silly whighead! Dream of worlds and whine
For Beauty gone with strife, and bend your back
To carry this Corpse, this Mc, this All-decline.
Down among Has-beens in your dirty sack."*

*"Kind sir! I begged a penny just to buy
One little world to fill an empty sky!"*

That he called God A-Begging of an Unrepentant Sinner. And this which clinched his insanity for the jury he called On. With the Dance! •

*"I am a young fool green with a smouldering heart,
And I dance before the Ancient-of-Days' bright Hinder Part
Till I shine golden as Moses; and the sapphire floor
Of Heaven reels upward, calls on me to adore.
But I dance and I dance and will not fall on my knees
Till God's wrath starts in His beard like a going of bees.
But I dance all Winter and Summer till all time has sped,
And I see the bend of God's back as he turns his head
To look at this louse that I am. By and bye
He cannot but look, — looks — and bewildered not to die,
Up at him stares this fool of God-fooled men,
Alive! I am alive! I may stare again."*

'What do you make of him? I sit wondering over him often. But I am clear on one point. When he is free from this Bedlam at His Majesty's pleasure, I shall try to make up to him somehow for having exposed his nakedness.'

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No. 39

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DE SELINCOURT, Hugh.

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FALKNER, J. Meade

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No. 51

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No. 30

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No. 72

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'*Poor Caroline* is a novel alight with cleverness in every sentence. Miss Holtby has a sense of character, of sympathy, of fun and of the English Language.' SYLVIA LYND in the *News Chronicle*

HORN, Alfred Aloysius

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The book from which the film was taken

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HORN, Alfred Aloysius

TRADER HORN, IN MADAGASCAR

No. 31

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'You must buy it and keep it, for whenever and however often you dip into him, Aloysius Horn will hold you as surely as the Ancient Mariner gripped the wedding guest by the lapel of his coat.' DR. J. M. BULLOCH

HURST, Fannie

LUMMOX. A Novel

No. 7

The Saga of Bertha, maid-of-all-work. A tale of stark realism and frank revelation that lays bare a human heart. With character and drama on every page, *LummoX* is a book that will live.

BACK STREET

No. 66

This is the story of a girl living in the poor quarter of an American town in the 'nineties. Ray Schmidt was immensely attractive, and, left to run wild by her father, was regarded as irretrievably 'lost' by her step-mother. But although Ray was ready to go out with any man, and listened to their proposals without offence, she did so because of the generosity of her nature, and because the experience was so common to her that it made little impression. She herself remained care-free and whole-hearted until she met Walter Saxel. Her generosity and kindness to a worthless step-sister spoilt her chances of happiness; how her life was passed in the back streets of Walter's life is Ray's life-story and the substance of this book.

LEWIS, Sinclair

BABBITT. A Novel

No. 17

'A fascinating book. A novel which is as remarkable an achievement in town painting as Arnold Bennett's early renderings of the "Five Towns."' *Daily News*.

THE JOB

No. 63

The Job is one of the novels of Mr. Lewis's earlier period, written and published in America before *Main Street* and *Babbitt*. It tells the story of Una Golden, who goes to New York to see the world, and sees it as a worker of the great army of girls who go back and forth on the Elevated every day.

'A strangely penetrating and human story.' *Spectator*

'It contains all those qualities which made *Babbitt* a best-seller on both sides of the Atlantic.' *Observer*

LEWIS, Sinclair

DODSWORTH

No. 73

'*Dodsworth* is a tract if you choose (so was *Babbitt*), but it is a tract in the form of a truly first-rate story. It is "good reading." Embark on it, and you are carried away on a swift tide, and you exult in the swirling stream under you. Sinclair Lewis has few equals as a master of rushing narrative - I can't at the moment think of any. He possesses also a wonderful style, in which he employs not only slang, but thousands upon thousands of picturesque and accurately descriptive metaphors and similes.' ARNOLD BENNETT in the *Evening Standard*

LINKLATER, Eric

POET'S PUB. A Novel

No. 18

'Mr. Linklater is really the greatest fun. Even at his absurdest moments he is genuinely witty, so witty, indeed, that one can forgive him anything, even the dolorous barman. . . . The story, of course, is one long series of improbabilities, but that does not matter in the least. The book is first-rate entertainment.' RALPH STRAUS in the *Sunday Times*

LOOS, Anita

GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES

No. 52

The expressive term, 'a gold digger,' describes the writer of this diary. Here we have her in all her glory, in an amusing, astonishingly frank diary that takes her from New York to London, Paris, Vienna and Munich, in quest of an education in the foreign colleges known as Ritz Hotels. Diplomats, princes, society, big business men - she plays them all, especially men, men, men. Tiaras, state secrets, titles and Poirer models all fall into her pretty little net.

MACDONALD, James Ramsay

WANDERINGS AND EXCURSIONS

No. 8

Mr. Ramsay MacDonald has been a wide traveller and reader, and has an uncommon power of bringing an individual eye - the eye of the artist - to bear upon whatever he sees.

MAUROIS, André

COLONEL BRAMBLE

No. 32

The story, told by the French interpreter Aurelle, describes the doings of the Headquarters Mess of a Scottish Division in the Great War. The General himself, the staff, the doctor, the padre and above all, Private Brommit, who is the English army in one, are living human beings we all recognize and their conversation and reactions to the trials and tribulations of War are admirably observed and studied.

MAYO, Katherine

MOTHER INDIA

No. 19

'It is certainly the most fascinating, the most depressing, and at the same time the most important and truthful book that has been written about India for a good deal more than a generation.' *New Statesman*

SLAVES OF THE GODS

No. 53

In this volume the author of *Mother India* follows through her appeal for the release of India's degraded souls. *Slaves of the Gods* portrays in fiction form exactly what it means, worked out in flesh and blood, to be in Hindu India a child-wife, a Temple prostitute, a Suttee, a child-widow, an Untouchable or a Sacred Cow.

Dramatic and forceful, incredible almost, as these twelve records appear, yet each one is taken from real life and each has been carefully verified.

MORTON, J. B. ('Beachcomber' of the *Daily Express*)

THE ADVENTURES OF MR. THAKE

No. 59

A selection from 'Beachcomber's' two previous volumes *Mr. Thake* and *Mr. Thake Again*. When the first of these appeared the *Spectator* wrote:

'But Oswald Thake, that great man, that outstanding figure of our age, reads even better in a book than in a daily paper.' The figure of Thake expands and blossoms as we read, 'wisibly swelling before our very eyes,' taking on a new life, a new rich humour. . . . And how convey any idea of Thake on his travels - his innocent preoccupation with the conversation of fellow travellers, and his complete failure to get anything more out of Venice than he does out of Kensington or Wimbledon? For all this it is necessary to read the book. Even Thake's most faithful readers will discover him here for the first time; and will be left wondering - as we do - why on earth he wasn't made into a book years ago!

MOULT, Thomas

MARY WEBB: HER LIFE AND WORK

No. 74

Mary Webb's own story is as fascinating and as beautiful as any of her famous novels. Mr. Moulton's bond of sympathy with her writings, which he has revealed in his own novels and poetry, make him a fitting biographer. Into his narrative of a career that was by no means the unrelieved tragedy it seems, he has woven recollections of Mary Webb by those who knew her most intimately during childhood, youth, and womanhood. He has painted afresh the scenes of her beloved Shropshire that provided the setting of her stories. Also, his critical descriptions of Mary Webb's writings assign them their true place in English literature.

NICHOLS, Beverley

CRAZY PAVEMENTS. A Novel

No. 10

'Mr. Beverley Nichols has given us a clever satirical picture of the wickedness that lurks in Mayfair! An amazingly original entertainment, teeming with epigrammatical brilliancy and not a little, too, of the pathos of youth's inevitable disillusionment.'
Bookman

ARE THEY THE SAME AT HOME?

No. 44

'Mr. Beverley Nichols has carried a form of witty impudence to the furthest limit of good manners, and yet succeeded in keeping on the windy side of taste. The papers contained in this collection of his brilliances are something between interviews and character sketches and they include impressions of some sixty-one personages of repute. . . . Mr. Nichols has the wit to penetrate the armour of, and the impudence to reveal, exactly what he discovers below the surface.'
Daily Telegraph

EVENSONG

No. 62

The story of a great singer. 'With *Evensong*,' said Mr. Gerald Gould in the *Observer*, 'Mr. Beverley Nichols has taken a bold stride forward into the company of considerable novelists.' Mr. J. B. Priestley wrote in the *Evening Standard* - 'A brilliant novel. His heroine is colossal. Her egoism, her tantrums, her idiocies, her odd meannesses and extravagancies, her art - they are all there, and Mr. Nichols has exhibited his monster with the most admirable skill, now turning her this way, now that, for our delight.'

NICHOLS, Beverley
FOR ADULTS ONLY

No. 64

'A collection of the lightest and most amusing of this author's sketches. His subjects range from botany . . . to bridge, and from first nights to photography. Throughout they are told in form of conversations between a parent and a perfectly horrible and lifelike child.' *News Chronicle*

'Beverley Nichols, who can be more sweetly acid than almost any writer, has seen the satirical possibilities of testing our adult wisdom and folly by the touchstone of a child's clear logic. In his *Child's Guides* to knowledge of many kinds . . . he has invented a new and deadly form of satire.' *Everyman*
'A spirited and witty piece of sophistication.' *John o' London's Weekly*

WOMEN AND CHILDREN LAST

No. 69

In this book, written five years after *Twenty-Five*, and one year before *Down the Garden Path*, Mr. Nichols transfers his gay and impudent attention from the particular to the general. Women, rather than any individual woman, form the butt of his wit, which is as keen as ever. Few books can have contained so many charming taunts, delivered with a grace that softens their sting, though driving the barb deeper.

Several short stories are included in this volume, which contains, in addition, a highly controversial foreword by the author.

CRY HAVOC!

No. 82

'Here is a man who does actually feel a passionate hatred of war and the whole gang of warmongers—the devil's gambles of armament manufacturers, the Chauvinism of a commercial press, all the mean jumble of national spite and fears which are leading mankind up the next primrose path. . . . Some parts of this book are so effective, so good, that instead of being published very beautifully on good-quality paper they should have been turned out on the cheapest newsprint and dropped from aeroplanes—if the Air Ministry allowed this form of pacifist bombing.' *Manchester Guardian*

O'BRIEN, E. J.

MODERN ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

No. 11

This volume is a collection designed to present a panorama of the best work published by contemporary English writers of short stories.

O'BRIEN, E. J.

ENGLISH SHORT STORIES OF TO-DAY

No. 61

A new collection of representative English short stories and a companion volume to *Modern English Short Stories*. The authors in this volume include: Mary Arden, Josef Bard, Hector Bolitho, John Collier, A. J. Cronin, David Garnett, Louis Golding, Oliver Gossman, Norah Hoult, Eiluned Lewis, Eric Linklater, H. A. Manhood, Naomi Mitchison, Edward Sackville-West, Malachi Whitaker, Antonia White, Orlo Williams, and Romer Wilson.

NEW ENGLISH SHORT STORIES

No. 75

A companion volume to *Modern English Short Stories* and *English Short Stories of To-day*, both of which have been in great demand as *Florin Books*. The list of authors includes H. E. Bates, Arthur Calder-Marshall, Roger Dattall, Graham Greene, Janko Lavrin, Orgill MacKenzie, Frank O'Connor, L. A. Pavey, Hugh de Selincourt, L. A. G. Strong, Romer Wilson and E. H. Young.

O'FLAHERTY, Liam

THE INFORMER. A Novel

No. 33

'*The Informer* must be accounted a little masterpiece of its kind . . . his portrait of the brutish informer is so marvellously vivid, and his whole narrative, with its slowly increasing atmosphere of terror, so perfectly unfolded that the book must be ranked very high indeed. . . . *The Informer* is easily its author's best work. It is a quite unforgettable story.' *Sunday Times*

THE ASSASSIN

No. 76

'Mr. O'Flaherty is beyond doubt a remarkable writer, and this is in many ways his most remarkable book. I do not know where else, except, perhaps, in Dostoevsky, one would find the qualities which make *The Assassin* so coldly terrible in its savage disillusionment. Only among the Russian novelists would you find the same concentration of mental pain and aberration, until the sheer intensity of the thing becomes almost intolerable.' *The Sketch*

PARROTT, Ursula

STRANGERS MAY KISS. A Novel

No. 21

'*Strangers May Kiss* has wit, style, wisdom and a certain hard kind of beauty: the beauty of a fine thing gone wrong. It is about love, of course; but there is underneath the story an inner emotional reality which held me to the end.' *Sunday Referee*

PRICHARD, Katharine Susannah

HAXBY'S CIRCUS. A Novel

No. 34

'Often as circus life has been described, Miss Katharine Susannah Prichard must be given high marks for her vivid, sympathetic picture of a travelling troupe in Australia. The setting lends it pleasant novelty, the people have just that flavour of difference from English people which makes them interesting in themselves.' *Spectator*

ROBERTSON, E. Arnot

CULLUM. A Novel

No. 22

'*Cullum* is a moving and ironical first novel, the story of a girl's passion for a brilliant, plausible, hopelessly amoral young man . . . at its highest in the sceneries and the heroine's love passages, at its wittiest in the anatomies of Cullum, the fatal lack of cohesion between his heart and his head.' *New Statesman and Nation*

FOUR FRIGHTENED PEOPLE

No. 54

Here is a rich, queer, deliberately cold-blooded book that breaks most of the accepted rules of fiction – a violent romance told in humorous undertones, carefully unromantic – a record of swift, fierce action by detached and intelligent people. Throughout this account of an appalling journey in one of the Unfederated Malay States there runs a streak of light-hearted ruthlessness, which handles the sanctity of human life, religion, sex, and many of our Western prejudices, in a spirit that is more Malayan than English. This book is emphatically not for the sentimental. Its author's attitude is one of peculiar, unsparing honesty towards many aspects of life.

THREE CAME UNARMED. A Novel

No. 45

'The three who came unarmed are the three children, two boys and a girl, of a Norwegian mother and an English missionary who has died of drink on some vague island of the Malayan archipelago. They have grown up as savages, creatures of instinct, beautiful in body and untutored in mind . . . after their father's death they are suddenly precipitated into English provincial society . . . here is a rich opportunity for comedy and also for satire. Miss Arnot Robertson avails herself of her opportunity and has some very stinging things to say, also some very stinging caricatures to draw, but she never falls into the error of making her satire too blatant, and she is tolerant enough to realize that no character is wholly unsympathetic.' MISS V. SACKVILLE-WEST in a Broadcast Talk.

STARKE, Barbara

TOUCH AND GO

No. 68

With an Introduction by Alec Waugh.

This is the scrupulously honest narrative of a girl who hiked alone across the United States and back. It is a sensitive picture of countryside and city, prairie, mountain, river and forest, but – infinitely more interesting – it is the first unfictionized commentary on the morality of the 'open road' as experienced by a woman. Asking no favours, and inhibited by no conventional taboos, she held her course among the endlessly variegated casualties who tried to help her or hurt her, reform her or head her for perdition. With the same clear eye through which she watched others she watched herself, and her judgments on her own behaviour are just as frank. The people she met were legion, their motives, viewpoints and morals as diversified as their looks. Commercial travellers, college professors, farmers, rum runners, cowboys, lorry drivers, jailbirds, evangelists, telegraph linesmen, dope fiends, undertakers.

THORNDIKE, Russell

DR. SYN. A Novel

No. 46

'I envy those who are to make his acquaintance for the first time. I remember with a thrill the feeling I had when you first showed him to me. Here was another of those creatures of the family of Daniel Quilp (our first great love, wasn't he?), creatures that are above ordinary standards of right and wrong, – who, even if they murdered their favourite aunt would have been forgiven – they being so much larger and more lovable than afore-said aunt.' *From the Preface by SYBIL THORNDIKE*

THE SLYPE

No. 55

The innumerable readers of Russell Thorndike's earlier book, *Dr. Syn*, will remember his uncommon dexterity in the manipulation of a mystery.

To reveal that *The Slype* is a deep, dark and sinister alley with high and terrifying walls connecting the Deanery with the cathedral in a sleepy old Kentish town, is no betrayal of the secret of the book. For that eerie and disquieting chasm played an intimate part in the disappearance of a Dean, the concealment of a Canon, and the strange conspiracy revolving about the cathedral plate.

WAKEFIELD, H. Russell

GHOST STORIES

No. 35

'When Mr. Wakefield is warmed up and his combustion is good, he can make you believe anything. He transmits the horror and the nastiness, he gives you the shudder you deserve.'

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

A GHOSTLY COMPANY

No. 77

A new volume of uncanny tales by the author of *Ghost Stories*, well in keeping with what Mr. Christopher Morley has said about the previous volume.

WALMSLEY, Leo

THREE FEVERS

No. 83

'*Three Fevers* is a first novel about fisher people on the north-east coast, and it is done with extraordinary assurance and conviction. Everything in it is made plain, made real, and is grandly alive. Here, once and for all, are the fishermen of that coast as firmly set in these chapters as the burghers are in the pictures by the Dutch Masters.' J. B. PRIESTLEY in *The Evening Standard*

WEBB, Mary

PRECIOUS BANE. A Novel

No. 12

With an introduction by the Rt. Hon. Stanley Baldwin.

'She has a style of exquisite beauty, which yet has both force and restraint, simplicity and subtlety; she has fancy and wit, delicious humour and pathos. She has, in short, genius.' EDWIN PUGH

GONE TO EARTH. A Novel

No. 23

With an introduction by John Buchan.

'"Mary Webb need fear no comparison with any writer who has attempted to capture the soul of Nature in words," says Mr. John Buchan. We agree. There is mastery and magic in her writing.' *Spectator*

THE GOLDEN ARROW

No. 57

'The Devil's Chair,' a formidable rock, dominating a landscape of gaunt splendour, dominates also the soul of a man living in its shadows. The devotion of his mate, a woman of simple and beautiful character, fails to save him from a growing dread of madness. The mental struggle, born of the terrifying aspect of nature and the reluctance to desert the warmth and shelter of a single-minded love, ends in flight. Tragedy is averted by an awakening stronger than personal fear, to the supreme force of unselfish love.

WHIPPLE, Dorothy

YOUNG ANNE. A Novel

No. 47

'The charm of the story is due to its observations of the external drollery and pathos of provincial life.' *Punch*

This is an early novel by the author of *High Wages* and *Greenbanks*, a recent choice of the Book Society.

WHITECHURCH, Victor L.

THE CANON IN RESIDENCE. A Novel

No. 48

'A Whitechurch book is a cheerful thing to have about in weather that keeps one indoors.' *The Yorkshire Post*

'Canon Whitechurch's character-drawing is so good, his dialogue so true and unforced.' *The Birmingham Post*

'Few writers can give their readers the restful pleasure there is in Canon Whitechurch's books.' *The Scotsman*

'Canon Whitechurch's humour is always delightfully restrained, and he has few equals in this type of fiction.' *Nottingham Guardian*

WILSON, Margaret

THE ABLE MACLAUGHLINS

No. 56

This novel, which ten years ago won two prizes and was a best-seller, has not yet lost its popularity. It is the tale of a golden moment, of the best sort of British pioneer in the middle west, high-spirited, gay, hard-working people. The MacLaughlin women have been received into thousands of American families as cherished friends. It has been called an intensely exciting book, but it ends as quietly as those worthy lives ended, and goes quietly on in the memory—as those lives go on.

YOUNG, E. H.

THE VICAR'S DAUGHTER. A Novel

No. 24

'This is a comedy of errors—and the comedy is kept up to the end with what can only be called ~~snug~~ satisfaction, every turn of it being savoured luxuriously... Miss Young is to be thanked for a novel which, without violating probability, finds rich comedy in the deepest affection of the human heart.'

Manchester Guardian

YOUNG, E. H.

WILLIAM. A Novel

No. 36

'This is an unusually good novel . . . a charming and lasting tribute to a suburban generation that is passing, and it is a comforting book, too. For what a pleasure it is to pick up a novel which posits and affirms human values, instead of pursuing the general quest of the unseizable reality of the mythical "the"!'

Manchester Guardian

MISS MOLE

No. 58

'After reading *Miss Mole* I realize how grave was my omission to read the previous works of Miss E. H. Young. It is one which I intend to rectify as speedily as possible. For this new novel of hers is a book of such wit as comes to one but rarely. Miss Mole is, in fact, a darling, whom we should all like to know. Her creation justifies for her author the highest recognition.'

Punch

YOUSSOUPOFF, Prince

RASPUTIN. HIS MALIGNANT INFLUENCE AND HIS ASSASSINATION

No. 65

This is the only authentic account of Rasputin's death. Prince Youssouppoff tells how he gained Rasputin's confidence and prepared and baited the trap, of Rasputin's incredible struggle for life; and of what followed. This terrible drama throws fresh light on Russian history and Russian character.